

**COMING HOME PRISON MINISTRY**

By

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A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

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## ABSTRACT

### COMING HOME PRISON MINISTRY

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This dissertation is the story of how the Reformed Church of Bronxville (RCB) implemented and measured a practice of restorative justice with special emphasis on the following: mentoring, fellowship, life skills classes, public policy discussions, public policy advocacy and the sharing of narratives. These efforts define our Coming Home Prison Ministry for post-incarcerated individuals. The Coming Home program was part of a process to educate the whole community and move us all forward on an interactive service and learning journey involving congregants, participants and others in a variety of engaging and rewarding activities.

In this document an examination of relevant contexts is provided: first, a brief history of the United States criminal justice system; next, a review of the efforts of other churches with regard to this population; then, a Biblical basis for restorative justice as it is relevant in understanding the church's response; and finally, a description and report from evaluative activities to review the RCB journey. Reflection on the transformative process integral to how churches can be meaningfully involved in restorative justice is considered.

The data and information included herein are designed to help other organizations to replicate our efforts. In this paper the results of several focus groups, questionnaires and surveys are presented to quantify and evaluate learning which has taken place and shifts in perception since this ministry began. The results show that RCB's work with the

post-incarcerated has created a more informed community which engages more deeply in mission work with the poor, now moving beyond charity and working for systemic change. People are more understanding of systemic issues and are better prepared to identify and address the root causes of problems. The process of transformation was evident as people “lived their faith.” Living your faith is a generative power, and Coming Home provided an opportunity for congregants to do this, using their gifts to meet the needs of participants and to grow in understanding, compassion and awareness.



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## INTRODUCTION

Inspired to higher heights by A and O Wyatt  
I read Soul Be Free, and thought I might try it  
So here goes my shot at a poem, prose or prayer  
But public speaking makes me ill, so you ought to beware:  
One day I was leaving my dear friend Anne's  
To go about my busy plans  
It was just passed York, on 65th street  
A dandelion had accomplished a miraculous feat  
Growing right there through a crack in cement  
On the sidewalk right where the concrete steps bent  
My mind began flooding with many faces  
From inside, from outside, and from many places  
Who in spite of terribly harsh conditions  
Are determined to grow and bring gifts to fruition  
Not just to survive, but to blossom and flourish  
Our spirits are giant, unstoppable when nourished!  
We're learning this now, at The Reformed Church  
As we work with returning citizens who search  
To thrive in a system that just doesn't see  
The Divine gifts of each person and all they can be  
Yes, we all believe in second chances  
I've had my own share and each one enhances  
My ability to make better choices and grow  
As I learn more, there is one thing I know  
The color of my skin, my geography and Savior  
Has kept me out of prison more than my behavior  
There but for the grace of God go I  
And so comes the responsibility to understand why  
And create a world of compassion, and opportunity  
Rehabilitation, not greed, punishment and punity,  
One step at a time, with love in our hearts  
With commitment, and faith, and a dash of some smarts.  
Thankfully here are some sisters and brothers  
To lock arms with and journey with as our church discovers  
Our role in the good holy work that lies ahead  
So when I feel like a scrawny leaf hanging by a thread  
Blowing in the winds of poverty and injustice  
For strength and renewal I can remember just this:

We are all connected to a large sturdy tree  
It has deep roots, grounded in Thee  
And when the rains come, this tree grows even more strong  
Yes under this faithful tree I belong  
Thank you brother Alfonso and your strong family tree  
And every warrior in this room that I see  
I am honored to be among you  
And wish you blessings and gratitude for all that you do.  
Now I humbly request that you raise your libation  
And toast with your neighbor to hope and transformation

Dawn Ravella  
Acceptance speech for Esther House Prison Ministry award, May 26, 2012,

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION TO THE REFORMED CHURCH OF BRONXVILLE COMING HOME PRISON MINISTRY**

#### **The Community**

Bronxville, NY is an affluent suburb 15 miles north of New York City. Founded in the late 19th Century, the village was carefully planned and managed to attract professionals and successful artists. Growth was measured and defined: Bronxville advertised an “index of desirability”<sup>1</sup> and maintained restrictive covenants. The legacy of these covenants and cautions is apparent today. Bronxville is 92 percent white and ranks among the nation’s 20 highest income communities. It’s a stately, manicured place, with grand buildings, attractive homes, and easy access to Manhattan on the commuter train. It has been home to statesmen, management gurus, investors, media standouts and more. Bronxville may be fairly characterized as traditional, comfortable, compact and secure.

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<sup>1</sup> Roger G Panetta, *Westchester: The American Suburb* (New York: Fordham University Press 2006), 259.

US Census Bureau 2010  
Bronxville, New York Census Data

People QuickFacts	Bronxville	New York
Population, 2010	6,323	19,378,102
Persons under 5 years, percent, 2010	5.9%	6.0%
Persons under 18 years, percent, 2010	30.6%	22.3%
Persons 65 years and over, percent, 2010	13.9%	13.5%
Female persons, percent, 2010	53.0%	51.6%
White persons, percent, 2010 (a)	90.3%	65.7%
Black persons, percent, 2010 (a)	1.4%	15.9%
American Indian and Alaska Native persons, percent, 2010 (a)	Z	0.6%
Asian persons, percent, 2010 (a)	5.2%	7.3%
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, percent, 2010 (a)	0.0%	0.0%
Persons reporting two or more races, percent, 2010	2.0%	3.0%
Persons of Hispanic or Latino origin, percent, 2010 (b)	4.4%	17.6%
White persons not Hispanic, percent, 2010	87.1%	58.3%
Living in same house 1 year & over, percent, 2007-2011	87.9%	88.5%
Foreign born persons, percent, 2007-2011	10.4%	21.8%
Language other than English spoken at home, percentage 5+, 2007-2011	14.2%	29.5%
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2007-2011	98.0%	84.6%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25+, 2007-2011	84.1%	32.5%
Housing units, 2010	2,430	8,108,103
Homeownership rate, 2007-2011	76.1%	54.8%
Housing units in multi-unit structures, percent, 2007-2011	51.0%	50.5%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2007-2011	\$926,900	\$301,000
Households, 2007-2011	2,264	7,215,687
Persons per household, 2007-2011	2.66	2.59
Per capita money income in the past 12 months (2011 dollars), 2007-2011	\$111,656	\$31,796
Median household income, 2007-2011	\$179,286	\$56,951
Persons below poverty level, percent, 2007-2011	2.1%	14.5%
Land area in square miles, 2010	0.96	47,126.40
Persons per square mile, 2010	6,572.8	411.2

(a) Includes persons reporting only one race.

(b) Hispanics may be of any race, so also are included in applicable race categories.

FN: Footnote on this item for this area in place of data

NA: Not available

D: Suppressed to avoid disclosure of confidential information

X: Not applicable

S: Suppressed; does not meet publication standards

Z: Value greater than zero but less than half unit of measure shown

F: Fewer than 100 firms

Source: US Census Bureau State & County QuickFacts

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<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau,  
<http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/36/3608532.html> (accessed January 28, 2013).

## **Reformed Church of Bronxville**

The vision of The Reformed Church of Bronxville is to create a community of extraordinary love and service by:

- Loving God with all our hearts;
- Accepting all people;
- Caring for all people;
- Growing all people;
- Serving all people;

The church provides excellent programs for children and youth.

From the beginning, The Reformed Church (RCB) has been a church for the community. Though the congregation is made up of persons from many denominations, RCB is a member of The Reformed Church in America. Reformed Church history can be traced to the Netherlands in the 17th century, to Germany and Switzerland during the Protestant Reformation, and beyond to the church of Jesus Christ in its earliest days.

The Reformed Church of Bronxville is committed to teaching God's word, deepening lives through prayer, worship, learning and teaching. RCB seeks to glorify God, to reach people inside the community and beyond with the message of the Gospel, to reach out inclusively to each other in Christian love, and to train people for ministries to do God's work in the world.<sup>3</sup>

The Reformed Church of Bronxville proudly proclaims a position as one of the most vital Protestant Churches in the United States with excellence in leadership by its ministers, and by an increasingly involved and committed congregation. The Reformed Church of Bronxville is one of the largest congregations within The Reformed Church of America, one of the oldest denominations in North America.

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<sup>3</sup> The Reformed Church of Bronxville, "Who We Are," <http://www.reformedchurch.org/page.php/prmID/471> (accessed February 3, 2013).

The Reformed branch of Protestantism can be traced to the 15<sup>th</sup> Century Reformation leader, John Calvin. The reform spread into Scotland, where it became the Presbyterian Church, and into the Netherlands, where it became the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>4</sup>

RCB is governed by the Consistory, elected elders and deacons along with the clergy they have called. Regional governing bodies are called Classes and Regional Synods. The General Synod gathers once a year to make decisions that affect the entire church.

Although RCB is steeped in tradition, it is more recently open to changes. It has a formal past and until recently ushers wore morning coats to service. The three Sunday worship services are each very different. The early morning service is small, about 50 people; we gather in the choir loft of the sanctuary and the Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday at this service. The 10:30 AM worship is the main service and is usually attended by approximately 250 people. There is a children's sermon during worship and then children are dismissed to Christian Education classes.

Children's choirs begin with the cherubs and work their way up to adulthood. The position of Music Director has been held by many distinguished organists. The music department has grown to include a Children's Choir Director, another Organist, and a Hand Bell Director. Classical and traditional mainline hymns accompanied by the pipe organ, soloists and many choirs enrich this service which could easily be described as "high church." Music is another great priority for RCB and many resources are directed to provide outstanding music. I had to reschedule "Empowerment Sunday" when Alfonso

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<sup>4</sup> Reformed Church in America, "Brief Outline of History," <https://www.rca.org/Page.aspx?pid=2181> (accessed February 3, 2013).

Wyatt was scheduled to preach because a special worship celebration was already planned on that day for the organ dedication. Eucharist by intinction is celebrated three times throughout the year.

Recently added, “the Gathering” is a very relaxed service offered in a less formal part of the church, the Congregational Hall. It is very different than our traditional service, yet in my opinion, equally appealing. It is casual and interactive. People bring homemade cookies and coffee to their seats. This worship is attracting many new people who are not currently attending worship services. It also seems to attract many Catholics. Contemporary Christian rock and jazz standards are performed by young local musicians. The sermons are practical and geared to non-churched folks who are looking for a meaningful message as opposed to the 10:30 AM worshippers who are often steeped in church history and biblical studies. Although this service has grown in numbers that it could be considered the third largest congregation within RCA, it is not completely welcomed by many of the church consistory members. This seems to conflict with the many discussions that we need to grow the church.

Lay leaders are included in worship service and recently have begun to lead the Christian Education classes offered between the two early services.

The church is very welcoming and members graciously greet anyone new or unfamiliar. The congregation lacks diversity, which is a reflection of the town. Recent efforts to grow the church sparked discussions about the congregation’s intimidating formal attire and “high church” style of service. I was part of an amusing conversation when a group of men at coffee hour gathered and laughed at themselves. Each had agreed the previous night to attend worship without a tie to help convey a more relaxed feeling



in the congregation. Each came to church in their tie, too uncomfortable to break free from this tradition.

The Reformed Church has great capacity and numerous resources. It was reported that:

The Church had received \$1.438 million in pledges as of the end of the first week of February 2012. This represents a 7.1% increase from the same pledgers last year. Bill anticipates an additional \$86K from the remaining people who pledged last year but have not done so this year (assuming a 0% increase). Pledges from new members are budgeted at \$10K to \$15K and the same amount of over pledges as in 2011 should add another \$44K. This would total \$1.558 million, or \$20-30K short of expenses. Alan Zanzano believes this shortfall can be covered with cost savings, which will be identified before March 11 in order to present a balanced budget to the Congregation.<sup>5</sup>

This EMC pledge is supplemented yearly by an endowment that was established in 1952. The wise investments of the past have now resulted in Property and Maintenance endowment funds and outreach endowment funds that allow for extraordinary facilities and programs.

The building and the Church grounds are impeccably cared for. This attention to preserving the beauty of the church home is apparent right down to the polished silver and personalized china at coffee hour. The building was designed by the architect Harry Leslie Walker, a member of the church. The architecture echoes an English church of the middle ages with Gothic aspects and a large tower. There is a courtyard and notable stained glass windows by Charles J. Connick of Boston. A large gallery window over the main entrance of the church serves as a World War II memorial window. One of our

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<sup>5</sup> The Reformed Church of Bronxville, "Reformed Church of Bronxville Consistory Minutes," minutes from the monthly Consistory meeting, Bronxville, New York, February 8, 2011.

congregants, Cindy Tether, regularly gives tours and educational classes about our stained glass windows.<sup>6</sup>

RCB also owns expensive real estate properties that currently house staff. The Senior Minister lives in the Manse and an Associate Pastor lives in a house across the street from the church; both are in a very high end real estate market. My husband and I are fortunate to be temporarily housed at a reduced rent in a church-owned condominium in the neighboring town of Tuckahoe. We love it, and wish we could afford to stay here beyond the generous contract date they gave us. This is a good segue into a giant and important untapped resource at RCB—the intellectual and social capital, contacts and resources of the congregants which could be directed to address poverty.

Again, I'll use my husband Glen and myself as an example. Although we are middle class and removed from poverty, we benefit on many levels from the generosity at RCB. Over the summer we were invited to the vacation home of some congregants. Although the intention of our visit was social, they genuinely listened to us and decided to use their connections to make things happen for us in a way we could not do on our own. When we left their home, we had received foundation funding for a support staff person for me, and arrangements were made for Glen and me to join them for dinner with an entertainment professional that was able to provide connection and opportunity for my husband in the music industry. Glen and I were so inspired and grateful. This is a great example of possibilities for RCB once they enter into relationship with others; they have far-reaching capabilities that are untapped!

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<sup>6</sup> John Cory et al., *A Celebration: The Reformed Church of Bronxville 1850-2000* (New York: William A Raymond and Robert Seabring, 2000), 74.

RCB has many programs. Regular opportunities within Mission, under my direction include:

- Midnight Run and Breakfast Run to deliver food and blankets to those living on the streets of Manhattan;
- Westhab Playgroup which offers safe play space and lunch to mothers and children from the neighboring city of Yonkers;
- Habitat for Humanity housing builds;
- Clothing Closet which is not only open to individuals in need, but also has regular sales, the proceeds of which benefit the Elm Street Neighborhood Youth Center summer programs and Midnight Run;
- Kenya partnership with Cross Cultural Thresholds;
- Fair-trade Holiday Sale featuring the work of artisans from around the world who receive 100% of the proceeds;
- Soup Kitchen provisions which are delivered to a local soup kitchen;
- Coming Home Prison Ministry;
- Opening Doors Yonkers
- Angel Tree
- White gifts- holiday giving drive
- Film Nights with discussions to follow about social justice issues;
- Many “one time” events, such as The Vote Out Poverty campaign, recycling bicycle campaigns, *Awakening the Dreamer* symposiums and many educational opportunities.

The Reformed Church of Bronxville continues a strong tradition of opening its doors to local, non-profit community groups and activities, such as Scouts, Brownies, the League of Women Voters, Junior League, Senior Citizens of Bronxville, Bronxville Adult School, AA, and Al-Anon. These are some of the many organizations who use RCB facilities as they continue to enrich our greater Southern Westchester community.<sup>7</sup>

RCB has a wide range in theologies, from staff to consistory to congregants. In addition to different upbringings and denominations among ordained clergy, a huge portion of our staff and congregants grew up (and some remain) Catholic. A smaller

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<sup>7</sup> Reformed Church of Bronxville, “Who We Are.”

percentage comes from evangelical roots. I was recently informed that the Evangelical congregants are growing in number and are significant donors.

Senior Minister, Ken Ruge was raised in the Midwest as Methodist, shaped by Wesleyans and is no doubt influenced by his wife, an Episcopal Priest. He was a seasoned psychotherapist before taking the position at RCB. He is also influenced by Norman Vincent Peale and by his travels in the world and studies of other cultures. His beliefs are Universalistic and pluralistic. His sermons pull from an expansive realm. Although Ken's sermons often focus on our individual and internal growth, he has a deep sincere commitment to Mission. It is under his leadership and with his support and wisdom that RCB mission has exploded with creativity, opportunity and growth.

Associate Minister, Keith Draght is one of two pastoral staff persons who is traditionally Reformed. He is from Michigan, came out of Willow Creek, and is influenced by the seeker-sensitive model. His gifts and experience made him a natural success as he began "the Gathering," the informal Sunday evening worship at RCB.

Associate Minister, Cari Pattison describes herself as a biblically-centered evangelical conservative. She grew up in Kansas, attended a liberal mainline Presbyterian Church until college when she became involved in Intervarsity. Cari recently discovered yoga and loved it so much that she became a certified yoga instructor and has added a menu of opportunities to the congregation.

Youth Minister, Addison Quale, from Bronxville, is a conservative evangelical who studied at Gordon Conwell and is recently ordained in RCA. His libertarian beliefs often conflict with my view of Christian mission. As a result, we have not collaborated as I had in the past with previous Mission and Youth Directors. So far, this has not been

problematic, but it does concern me because this collaboration is written in my job description. Addison and I continue to dialogue and grow on our faith journey with the hope of finding common ground that will create fruitful work for us together in the future. This dialogue, while not my favorite thing to do, gives me hope for a more peaceful world. Our beliefs are so different, yet we both sincerely work to engage respectfully in difficult dialogue. My hope is that we can move to a place where we can keep our politics out of our religion but keep our religion in our politics!

The Church School Director, Nursery School Director, Music Ministers and a large percentage of the staff are Roman Catholic. Four of us feel “called” to ministry in a way that Catholicism does not allow women. Each of us believes we are doing work completely in alignment with our Catholic faith beliefs within the RCB.

During a recent discussion among pastoral staff, I was suggesting that Jesus taught us that the way we live our lives is most important if we are to follow Him. The music minister inserted that Worship is most important. Others agreed because you cannot live the way Christ taught unless you are attending worship. I agree that staying connected to God is essential to living a good Christian life, although I am not convinced that worship is the most important means of staying connected to God. It is dependent on the larger picture of the preaching, music and community. Much like a person eating a meal at McDonald’s, versus an organic healthy meal, what you are fed effects the level of nourishment and ability to function optimally in the world. Worship, centering prayer, meditation, scripture, nature, experiencing the Divine in all individuals, life and creation, are all part of staying connected to God and all interdependent. If I go to worship on Sunday and criticize all the components of the service because they are not perfect, and

then gossip about my neighbor and pass a hungry hurting person on the way out, I am missing the mark. The discussion that followed highlighted the different theological views within our leadership team.

The church is currently engaged in a strategic planning process. There has been a lot of energy and time dedicated to following church trends, and our need to brand ourselves and communicate who we are for our sustainability. Alban Institute was hired to help with this process. Behind the scenes, some of the pastoral staff members, including myself, are struggling to find balance and to keep up with the work demands of the congregation. Some will secretly admit to not feeling safe in their job, and feeling the need to keep certain people happy. For me, I feel strongly that my role is to encourage people to live the Gospel message by addressing poverty and injustice. I am aware of the language I use, and have been told not to use the word “justice.” I am sensitive to the fact that a largely Republican, powerful congregation, can be turned off by messages from Saul Alinsky or others about systemic change. I try to make sure the message I send about power and influence is not a negative one, but rather that power and influence can be used for the greater good.

Despite our diverse roots and range of theological perspectives, I feel hopeful about our staff as we grow together and learn to work together as a team. Under Ken’s leadership, we are each encouraged in our own growth process, but we face real challenges. One danger I see within a structure of committees that operate independently is that we could easily adopt an “us” vs. “them” mentality and compete over limited resources. Although it is a wealthy congregation, the leadership often focuses on the scarcity and the fear around a declining denomination. Although this may be consistent

within all organized religions, RCB is looking to brand itself and remain vital. Another way to look at this would be to accept that the church is changing as people identify with being spiritual and not religious. This would give us the chance to be part of the process of defining and shaping what this new spiritual community will look like and hopefully design a more compassionate, loving and just world. Another issue is that the pastoral staff is called to be a prophetic voice to the very people who have the power to hire and fire them. This can be tricky.

The fact that the senior minister, Ken Ruge, is a skilled and seasoned therapist and is new to full time congregational life allows him to have a fresh perspective and unfailing strength and faith convictions. The staff is also a group of individuals operating with integrity, principles, kindness and compassion toward one another and, I believe, with the sincere hope for each other's success. I believe this to be a moment in time when there is a chance for significant growth.

### **The Program**

In September 2010 The Reformed Church of Bronxville launched the Coming Home Prison Ministry in partnership with Hudson Link and Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness & Housing. Seeds for this ministry were planted by a small group of faithful folks from our Mission Council, spearheaded by Tony Lemberger. They believed that although RCB was quite generous, we could do even more to live out the Gospel message. Eventually this led to my position as Director of Mission.

When I began at RCB it was different than the other churches where I have worked to mobilize people to put their faith into action. Essentially, good people were looking for a menu of opportunities to serve others, which would allow them and their

children to volunteer in spite of other demanding obligations. My hope was to move people from being benevolent and charity-minded to looking at prevention, the root causes of problems, and working for justice. Most of my previous ministry experience was spent engaging and building community, organizing neighbor to help neighbor. There is an organic process, as people become engaged in helping others, systemic issues become clear. As people learn of each other's angst, a "holy anger" builds up and people are moved to action. Bronxville, however, is quite removed from poverty and it's possible not to see the poverty unless we choose to. It's also quite a challenge to move people to embrace the idea of work for systemic change when the system is working fine for them. I recognized that there is a big commitment on the part of RCB congregants to engage in mission and an important first step at RCB was to enable Bronxville folks to enter into relationship with people who weren't from the same socio-economic background.

Mission Council and I went to work exposing different issues to the congregation at Christian Education hour and through films, speakers and events, keeping an eye out for any enthusiasm from congregants as a possible starting point for engagement. There was some interest in prison ministry after viewing *Hard Road Home*<sup>8</sup> with a facilitated discussion following the film led by Josh Oleskar of Auburn Media. Annie Rawlings—from NYC Presbytery's Self-Development of People, and collaborator on NYC Presbytery's Restorative Justice document—taught a Christian Education class with a formerly incarcerated man named Will that really engaged RCB folks and piqued their interest.

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<sup>8</sup> Macky Alston et al., *Hard Road Home* Green House Pictures ([Westport, CT]: Hartley Film Foundation, 2007).



When Dr. Ruge came on board as Senior Minister, bringing his heart for prison ministry and his connections to Bruce MacCleod at Hudson Link, we began a transformational journey.

*Coming Home* is an eighteen-session life skills empowerment program for returning citizens. The program includes workshops, goal setting with mentoring, life skills sessions, and story sharing in a supportive environment. It was a program I was familiar with from my work with people who were homeless in New York City. I thought the foundation of the course would be useful to anyone who would like to make a plan and set goals for a fulfilling future. I thought it would require a small amount of tweaking to fit the needs of returning citizens, and felt confident with the expertise and cooperation of Sean Pica, Executive Director of Hudson Link. The process was way more difficult than I had envisioned, yet worth every second of it!

For the first series, Sean Pica, Executive Director of Hudson Link for Higher Education, worked closely with us, and together we worked with eleven extraordinary, talented, driven men who were committed to a better life after prison despite tremendous obstacles (many of the men are also NYTS graduates). Certainly the Holy Spirit was alive and present as we journeyed together and formed lasting relationships.

Most surprising for me was the enthusiasm from the congregation. So many people wanted to volunteer that we expanded the program to include weekly meals, prepared and served by congregants who dined with program participants. This was a powerful addition to the program.

Because of our new understanding of the criminal justice system and of the neighborhoods referred to as “the cradle to prison pipeline,” our ministry exploded. We

have held Public Policy Forums to engage elected officials and experts in dialogue around some of the systemic issues that need to be addressed, including education in prison, parole reform, work release, as well as mental health and substance treatment. Some of our congregants and graduates are jointly exploring social entrepreneurship. In concert with Coming Home (CH), our new Opening Doors initiative is a systemic change project in Yonkers designed to address the revolving door of poverty by collaborating with and re-engineering existing services, mobilizing residents and offering support and opportunity to street leaders.

Beck Institute of Religion and Poverty at Fordham University began to study the CH program, so we could make improvements and use evidenced based practices to enable other houses of worship to replicate it. Within the first series, we were approached by seven different houses of worship that were interested in exploring beginning a Coming Home type program in their own community.

Although our intention at RCB was to live our faith by supporting returning citizens, clearly the transformation was extended to us.

### **The Challenge**

The Reformed Church of Bronxville is a progressive, suburban congregation comprised of many highly-educated, professional, high-achieving, powerful, financially savvy, committed, faithful people. The commitment to church and helping others is considered a priority.

My dream is to harness that commitment and energy to deepen our faith commitment to help others—looking beyond charity to the root causes of problems—in

order to become leaders working for change in the world. This would require a paradigm shift from a traditional charity and service oriented community.

Although this congregation is generous and already doing many great things, I believe we can do more with greater impact. Because the church is made up of many movers and shakers, transformation, when it occurs here, is bound have a greater impact in the world. I hope that as congregants begin to form relationships with people who are living in poverty, they will begin to understand some of the deeper complex issues, the need for systemic change, and how each of us is an important part of that process. My dream is that congregants will immerse themselves in a faithful and intellectual heart-centered study of the causes of poverty and the need for each of us to make all decisions in life through the lens of our faith. This includes economic, political, environmental, parenting and social decisions. Once this occurs, we will be moved to action in a different way. This is a realistic possibility because of a small group of committed, well respected folks who are actively engaged in RCB, on Mission Council, Consistory and also working in the trenches on Mission programs.

My project is a mini documentary to highlight the Coming Home Prison Ministry which is one small component of allowing people to become involved in a community of folks different from Bronxville residents. The documentary will not only shine light on our program, but also some of the issues connected to incarceration. Two years ago, we began this pilot prison ministry. The project is an 18-week program for people being released from prison. Congregants have the opportunity to get involved in many ways, from cooking and serving a meal to teaching classes, mentoring, looking at policy issues such as parole reform, prison closures and education in prison, as well as examining

neighborhoods called the “Pipeline to Prison” or “million dollar blocks.” The program has generated so much interest and enthusiasm within the community that I had to expand the program components to absorb the number of congregants interested in volunteering.

A beautiful outcome of this expansion has been a weekly community meal with program participants and congregants dining together. People are reporting being transformed by the experience. Participants have expressed feeling welcomed and not judged. Congregants who are mentoring are recognizing their desire to do more, to be more helpful, and the feeling of inadequacy about how to proceed. There’s an opportunity to seize the enthusiasm and offer a lot of education regarding poverty, racism, trauma, forgiveness, and our punitive and ineffective criminal justice system. This is a stepping stone in the learning process that calls people of faith away from a “charity” mindset and moves them toward an understanding of our need to take a lead role in creating systemic change and a society that is moving toward restorative justice, forgiveness and taking responsibility for building a more just society. One challenge is that although the congregants are interested in learning more, their schedules are extremely tight and it is difficult to find time for training. In spite of this, something giant and beautiful is happening. I believe it is transformation.

## CHAPTER 2

### CRIME, PUNISHMENT AND REHABILITATION OVER THE CENTURIES

*Evan*

*He was one of eight kids, with an absent father and a mother who was heavily medicated when she wasn't hospitalized. The family had a stove and a single pot, for hot water and for cooking, bathing, and for anything else to sustain them. Aunts and siblings tried to front for her, making the officials believe that she was around so the rest could stay together.*

*Evan was young when he stopped going to school. He hated school. He had holes in his shoes and a crazy mother. Other kids made fun of him, bullied him. There was no comfort or safety at school, just as there was no shelter at home. The family found out when the 3rd grade truant officer came looking for him.*

*Evan found his way to a gang, or maybe they found him, but it turned out to be a place he felt he belonged. He and the gang did what gangs do, small stuff at first, then more serious crimes. An uncle of one of the gang members came up with a gun, if Evan could come up with \$100. He worked so hard for 10 weeks to raise the money.*

*There was a violent episode and someone was killed. Evan was part of it, and went to jail for 30 years. And that's where his journey took a strange and hopeful turn. Jail turned out to be more like a home than any home he'd known, there were regular meals, a place to sleep, a routine that let him breathe, and feel secure, and think.*

*It was in jail that Evan studied the Bible. It was there that he read, and studied, and earned a graduate degree. It was there that he found out he had something of value inside him, and determined to act it out once he was released.*

*Thirty years is a long time to hold on to a dream. Long, but not impossible. Evan the first Valedictorian of Coming Home Prison Ministry at the Reformed Church of Bronxville. He is strong, bright, big-hearted, inspiring! It was Evan who challenged me to reach, to stretch, to work on my own dream of a doctorate. He showed me what was possible - he's applied to John Jay College of Justice for his own doctorate.*

*It's not easy being Evan. He gets headaches, and sometimes he's hard to track down. But he has come through a terrible childhood and an adult struggle to be transformed, and to witness the power of faith and connection with the broader community.*

In this chapter I lay out the evolution of two important institutions in American society: prisons and our views of incarceration, reentry and rehabilitation; and forensic social work, which has played an increasingly important role as we move to a more humane and restorative view of ex-offenders. I lay out a chronology of approaches to crime and punishment, twinned with a survey of the growth and essential role of forensic social work. Finally, I address contemporary issues facing all those working for a more just and effective means of managing incarceration in a complex society.

### **Earliest Practices**

In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* by Michel Foucault the translator provides a note at the opening of the book illustrating that prior to jails it was a social highlight in parts of the world during the eighteenth-century to attend the public torture and execution of criminals. Over centuries, our thinking about crime and punishment has evolved, and is still evolving. The emergence of the Western penal methods in the seventeenth century, when torture of the body gave way to punishment of the soul through rehabilitation began the process of moving towards detainment.<sup>9</sup> In the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries detention became the new movement in penal justice. Some of the first recorded “models” of penal detention—Ghent, Gloucester, Walnut Street—proved society’s ability to transition from public spectacles of humiliation and torture to more humane ways of detaining and then rehabilitating criminals through work on their bodies and minds.<sup>10</sup> Showing a concern for not only the crime but the committer of said crime as well, detainment in many ways showed a

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<sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, Aland Sheridan, trans. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Foucault, 231.

humanity, as opposed to merely a need to punish. A prison became a way of equalizing punishment and became “the penalty of civilized societies.”<sup>11</sup> Early on, even during the time of holding cells and coarse treatment, the seeds of change were planted. The Enlightenment suggested the possibility that man, being rational, could change his behaviors. The long path of incarceration and corrections has always moved between the two poles of punishment and/or rehabilitation.

Forensic social work, theory and practice, evolved along a parallel path with systems of punishment, incarceration and rehabilitation. Since the beginnings of the profession of social work, there has been close involvement with crime and punishment and rehabilitation. This involvement has included advocacy for the accused and for those convicted of a crime; support for the victims of crime; working with young people enmeshed in the juvenile justice system; court appearances for plaintiffs as well as the accused; collaboration with law enforcement; and an activists’ role in reshaping criminal justice policies.

Throughout US history, social justice (and in later years, global and universal human rights) has been the core of the theory and practice of social work. Social workers stand for those who cannot; speak for those who have been silenced; and seek to create conditions of empowerment for individuals, families, and communities. This is an important element in the understanding of prison programs, reentry and rehabilitation efforts, and the emerging partnerships between social work and faith-based institutions.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Pellegrino Rossi, *Traité de droit pénal* (Paris: Guillaumin, 1872), 169, as cited in Foucault, 232.

<sup>12</sup> Tina Maschi, Carolyn Bradley and Kelly Ward, *Forensic Social Work* (New York: Springer, 2009), 11.

I also believe that is worth noting that five of the six core values and ethical principles of social work could be lifted directly from scripture: 1) **Service**: a social workers primary goal is to help people in need address social problems; 2) **Social Justice**: social workers challenge social injustice; 3) **Dignity and Worth of the Person**: social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person; 4) **Importance of human relationships**: social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships; 5) **Integrity**, social workers behave in a trustworthy manner; and 6) **Competence**: Social workers practice within their areas of competence and develop and enhance their professional expertise.<sup>13</sup>

Social workers continually strive to increase their professional knowledge and skills and to apply them in practice. Social workers should aspire to contribute to the knowledge base of the profession.

The English Poor Laws of 1601 are significant in representing a merging of law and social policy, a codification of society's responses to individuals in distress with an emphasis on government as an entity in charge of those responses. The law responded to people in poverty, dividing them into three categories: deserving, undeserving, and children.<sup>14</sup> The Poor Laws are also significant because they offer the first opportunity for intervention by individuals who would later create the field of social work: advocates for those on the receiving end of the law.

The 17th century, while moving criminal justice further from torture and towards rehabilitation also saw the birth of what would become an ongoing revision of the

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<sup>13</sup> National Association of Social Workers, "Code of Ethics," <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp> (accessed February 3, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Phyllis J. Day, *A New History of Social Welfare*, 5<sup>th</sup> ed. (New York: Allyn & Bacon, 2006).



American approach to criminal justice and incarceration. The leaders to rethink the prison were the Quakers in Pennsylvania. As early as 1682, William Penn's colonial government experimented with incarceration as a substitute for capital and corporal punishment. The Quakers' goals were prevention of further harm to society, prevention, and by the early nineteenth century, the hope of the incarcerated to engage in "penitent reflection," which could result in their personal reformation. This was the beginning of an American innovation, the "penitentiary."

Quakers designed a prison where the people being held were totally isolated from one another, based on their own transformational experience of meditation. Each person had his own cell and a small yard surrounded by a high wall in which he could walk, work, and think. The first prison in the United States—"Walnut Street Jail"—was constructed in Philadelphia in 1790.<sup>15</sup> At that time crime was seen as arising from disturbance, prison staff imposed strict discipline and order on incarcerated individuals. This philosophy often carried over to almshouses and workhouses, which by definition were not correctional institutions, but whose operation was similar to prisons.<sup>16</sup> Although the name penitentiary was retained to describe a maximum security prison, the idea of silent meditation became a disgusting and damaging form of punishment. People were going crazy from the isolation and yet it's a controversial method that continues today. In later prisons, the convicts were brought together six days a week in communal workshops. While they were no longer isolated, they were still forced to maintain silence. reading and learning about the inhumane way people were treated.

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<sup>15</sup> Maschi, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

Early colonists were influenced by the laws and systems of England. Legally this meant they also planned responses to the impoverished members of their settlements: individuals were divided up and then those who were deemed unable to work were taken to almshouses or the able bodied to workhouses. They were reluctant to turn to the government as the appropriate responsible institution for maintaining law and order (the author suggests perhaps exhibiting what would now be understood as communal post-traumatic stress disorder from their experiences living under a monarch perceived to be overly rigid and tyrannical. Today we still overreact and enforce strict laws based on our fears.) As a result, early police forces were made up of men patrolling neighborhoods, first at night, later in the daytime too.<sup>17</sup> If a “criminal” were caught, the colonists sought punishment, usually of a physical nature. “Concepts of right and wrong and views of human nature at the time did not suggest that criminals would benefit from rehabilitation or that their victims needed support and advocacy.”<sup>18</sup>

### **Growth of the Prison System**

Matthew Meskell traces the rise of the penitentiary system in the United States from 1777 to 1877. By focusing on how the penitentiaries adapted to social and economic pressures, Meskell offers an explanation for why the system changed from one predominantly concerned with reforming people to one predominantly concerned with containing people. Ultimately, the wardens' inability to quantify their rehabilitative successes led legislators to set a new goal for the prisons: economic profitability. Meskell

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<sup>17</sup> C. R. Blakely and V. W. Bumphus, “American Criminal Justice Philosophy: What’s Old, What’s New?” *Federal Probation: A Journal of Correctional Philosophy and Practice* 63, no. 1 (1999): 62-66.

<sup>18</sup> Maschi, 11.

concludes that this shift in priorities best explains the deterioration of the early penitentiary system.<sup>19</sup>

As James S. Kunen has written,

Before independence, Americans generally flogged, branded or mutilated those felons they did not hang. Except for debtors and such minor miscreants as vagrants and drunkards, people were held behind bars only to await trial or punishment, and not as punishment.

In England as late as 1780, there were still over 200 capital offenses—among others, “stealing anything worth five shillings, felling a tree in someone’s private forest, robbing a rabbit warren, living for a month with gypsies, or picking pockets.” Hanging was commonplace.<sup>20</sup>

But generally, throughout this time in the Western world, the nature of criminal punishment was changing. The period between the late eighteenth and mid-nineteenth centuries, wrote Michel Foucault, saw “the disappearance of torture as a public spectacle and the gradual phasing out of corporal punishment. Less and less did society target the criminal’s body; rather, what we wanted to punish was his mind.” Philadelphia’s Walnut Street Jail, and later in 1829, its massive Eastern State penitentiary—the first institution to bear that label—were designed as places for people to spend the day entirely alone, with only daytime work projects in their cells and Bibles to keep them company. The arrangement came to be known as the Pennsylvania or separate system, and it attracted much attention abroad and at home.

Forensic social work emerged about the same time period, one of social work’s first professional societies created in 1879, was the National Conference of Charities and Corrections. In 1909, pioneer social worker Jane Addams became the leader of the

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<sup>19</sup> Matthew W. Meskell, “An American Resolution: The History of Prisons in the United States from 1777 to 1877,” *Stanford Law Review* 51 (1999): 839, 847-50.

<sup>20</sup> James Kunin, “Teaching the Prisoners a Lesson,” *The New Yorker*, 10 July 1995, 35, as cited in Ted Conover, *Newjack: Guarding Sing Sing* (New York: Knopf Publishing Group, 2001), 172.

organization. This shows how corrections has always been a priority for social workers. The history of forensic policy in the North American colonies brings with it the creation of social works to implement policies.

During the mid-1800s, questions were being raised about whether the policies and philosophies of corrections were effective. People understood that there was no motivation for a person in prison to do anything to improve their circumstances, since they'd be kept behind bars for a certain length of time regardless of their behavior. The concept of early release for good behavior was born. John Augustus, a successful shoe manufacturer in Boston, began a practice in the early 1840's of interviewing adults while they were waiting incarceration, posting their bail, and taking responsibility for their reformation. This became the process of probation in Massachusetts. (I cannot help notice that a wealthy shoe manufacturer could be compared to a wealthy RCB congregant and the potential that exists in our community.) The practice spread to two thirds of the states by 1920, enabling the first liberation from Elmira Reformatory in New York in 1876.<sup>21</sup>

A major accomplishment of early social workers was to change the policy that kept children as young as age 5 in penal institutions for criminal offenses.<sup>22</sup> Julia Lathrop, Jane Addams, and Lucy Flower pushed to stop the practice of children being incarcerated with adults. Their efforts led to the establishment of the juvenile justice system in 1899.<sup>23</sup> The system saw several innovations. The Juvenile Psychopathic

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<sup>21</sup> Maschi, 14.

<sup>22</sup> Anthony Platt, *The Child Savers: The Invention of Delinquency*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 146.

<sup>23</sup> Center on Juvenile & Criminal Justice, "Second Chances: Giving Kids a Chance to Make a Better Choice," <http://www.cjcj.org/pubs/archive.php> (accessed July 27, 2007).

Institute, founded as a result of advocacy by several residents of Hull House, who initiated psychosocial assessments of children in the justice system.<sup>24</sup> Many collaborators organized—this time separate juvenile courts were created, the first in Illinois in 1899. Forty-six states and the District of Columbia followed suit by 1925. Hearings for the juveniles examined delinquency cases and abused and neglected children. Interestingly, Societies for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, served as a model for the creation of The Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NYSPCC), founded in New York in 1875 which led to later juvenile justice reforms.<sup>25</sup>

The experience of social workers helped to shift the thinking about youthful offenders. Mary Richmond's efforts, first in Baltimore's Charity Organization Society and later as the Director for The Russell Sage Foundation, fought for creation of a system of social work education and practice for "recognizing human differences and adjusting our systems of...law, of reformation and of industry to those differences."<sup>26</sup> Jane Addams's also made landmark efforts to ensure that children were recognized as being developmentally different than adults and that they could not be expected to have mature decision making and needing guidance and care in this formation. These efforts led to closed hearings for children, and eventually confidentiality of their court records to follow them into adulthood.<sup>27</sup> In the mid to late 1800's reformers gained a renewed commitment to rehabilitation, partly due to the advent of parole and the creation of

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<sup>24</sup> Harvard University Library, "Open Collections Program: Working women: Jane Addams," [http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/people\\_addams.html](http://ocp.hul.harvard.edu/ww/people_addams.html) (accessed September 2, 2008).

<sup>25</sup> Maschi, 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

juvenile courts. This was the same time that prisons were increasingly renamed “penitentiaries,” and their goals included repentance and reform of the individual. These goals were in alignment with the dual aims of social work: systemic change and changing the individuals who have strayed from social systems. The American Association of Social Workers was created in 1921 (later to become the National Association of Social Workers) and casework became the central focus, and social workers became “correctional treatment specialists.”<sup>28</sup>

It’s important to note the role of faith and religious institutions in this evolution. A great illustration is that of Jerry McAuley. He was a man whose lifetime consisted of alcohol abuse, robbery and meaningless existence until he had a transformational vision of God while he was in prison. He then started what we now know as a rescue mission on October 1872 at 316 Water St in New York and began a movement to open the doors of religious institutions every night of the year specifically for the outcasts of society. He was responsible for millions of people having the opportunity to be healed physically, emotionally and spiritually. When he died in 1884 it was a surprise to many that his life was celebrated with one of the largest funerals in New York up until that time.<sup>29</sup>

By the turn of the century and into the early 20th century contemporary social work evolved as a much-needed profession as the United States was grappling with a myriad of social issues. In 1898, the first social work training school opened. The National Conference of Charities and Corrections (formerly the Conference of Boards of Public Charities) was created earlier in 1879, becoming the National Conference of

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Bonner, *Jerry McAuley and His Mission* (Neptune, NJ: Loizeaux Brothers, 1967), 10.

Social Work in 1917, and joining a collaborative to become The National Association of Social Workers in 1955. Social reform, and law and justice issues were a primary focus for social workers. Poverty became a major concern of pioneers like Mary Richmond, founding mother of casework and Jane Addams, founder of settlement houses and a Nobel Prize-winning social worker who targeted the systems and policies that affected the poor of her day.<sup>30</sup>

Social work was focused on the care and rehabilitation of the individual in prison, until the Great Depression caused a return to a focus on social change. Case workers recognized that the individuals they were working with were formerly working class or middle class and now were poor. This clarified that importance of policy change as a goal for the profession. Many New Deal programs were influenced by the expertise of social workers. Secretary of Labor, Frances Perkins, who had been trained by Mary Richmond, was instrumental in creating reforms including regulations ensuring safe conditions for American workers and the design and establishment of Social Security.<sup>31</sup> Social worker Harry Hopkins, appointed by President Hoover, then again by President Franklin Roosevelt oversaw new initiatives in the Works Projects Administration which focused on youth; these were the forerunners of today's delinquency prevention programs.<sup>32</sup> In the early 1920s police social workers were common but were cut following the Great Depression. They were women who provided social work advocacy as members of groups called women's bureaus, divisions within local police departments. These

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<sup>30</sup> Maschi, 14.

<sup>31</sup> Maschi, 16.

<sup>32</sup> A. R. Roberts and P. Brownell, "A Century of Forensic Social Work: Bridging the Past to the Present," *Social Work* 44, no. 4 (July 1999): 359-369.

positions returned to prominence in the early 1940s when youth gangs were growing in number. Hundreds of child guidance clinics employed social workers to act as court liaisons. Additionally community-based councils and delinquency prevention programs were created to focus on supporting and intervening for individuals, including children who dropped out of school and had been labeled by courts as “problem families.”<sup>33</sup>

Some have argued that moralistic considerations trump other factors in determining attitudes toward criminal punishment. Consequently, recent research has examined how views of God influence sentiments regarding criminal punishment. Using the Baylor Religion Survey (BRS) 2005, we find that (a) angry and judgmental images of God are significant predictors of punitive attitudes regarding criminal punishment and the death penalty and (b) images of God as loving and engaged in the world are not consistently significant predictors of attitudes toward criminal punishment, once measures of God’s perceived anger and judgment are considered.<sup>34</sup>

Whatever the moralistic climate, the facts are clear: there is currently an enormous “second society” of men and women behind bars. According to recent data, the U.S., while having only 4.5 percent of the world’s population, holds 21 percent of the world’s incarcerated people. Although the last few years have shown a slight decrease in incarceration rates, law enforcement policies continue to target racial minorities and foster high recidivism rates. Also with the rise of private, for-profit prisons, putting Americans behind bars is becoming an increasingly lucrative business.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> “Baylor Religion Survey 2005,” <http://www.thearda.com/archive/files/descriptions/BRS2005.asp> (accessed February 2, 2013).



- **2.3 million people** are in prison or jail in the U.S.--one in every 33 adults is behind bars or on parole (2010 figures).
- From 2002 to 2010, the number of persons held in for-profit prisons **increased 37 percent**, while the number detained by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in for-profit prisons increased 206 percent.
- In 2011, **70 percent** of people sentenced in federal criminal cases were people of color. More than 34 percent of prosecuted criminal cases were immigration-related, and 29 percent were drug-related. Fraud, the third most common offense, made up less than 10 percent of federal criminal cases.
- Approximately **700,000** ex-offenders are released from prison each year, and more than **40 percent** of them are re-incarcerated within three years of their release.
- The national unemployment rate hovers around 8.5 percent, but even before the recession, unemployment was roughly **75 percent** for ex-offenders in the year after release.<sup>35</sup>

### **Prisons for Profit**

The growing for-profit prison industry is a distressing development. The country's leading private prison corporation, Corrections Corporation of America (CCA) which owns or operates 66 detention centers in the U.S. recorded \$1.7 billion in total revenue in 2011. According to an article by Suevon Lee at ProPublica, CCA has also

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<sup>35</sup> Dawn Araujo, "Incarceration Nation," *Sojourners*, December 2012, 26-28.

spent \$17.4 million on lobbying over the past 10 years and made \$1.9 million in political contributions from 2003 to 2012.<sup>36</sup>

Though U.S. prisons have long outsourced certain aspects of their operations—such as dining or laundry services or medical care—to private contractors, until the 1980s local, state, or federal governments were the sole owners and operators. President Nixon, who officially declared the War on Drugs in 1971, was the first to link the Drug Enforcement Administration with federal law enforcement agencies, significantly shifting the country’s view of illegal drugs from social ills to criminal acts, which increased incarceration rates. Around the same time President Nixon made that connection, New York Governor, Nelson Rockefeller, was able to get a set of anti-drug laws passed by the state legislature. In May of 1973, the Rockefeller Drug Laws were passed. They were among the harshest drug laws in the nation, put in place to prevent citizens from using or selling drugs and to punish and cut-off from society those who could not abide by them. The Reagan administration ushered in the “private prison gold rush.” Reagan’s highly publicized draconian response to crack cocaine in the 1980s had a disproportionate impact on African-American communities. In the decades since, the prison population skyrocketed, with most of the conviction increase involving drug violations.<sup>37</sup>

In Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, she explains how a new racial caste system has been created. By creating the War on Drugs in the early 1980s, Alexander maintains, the federal government has manipulated the U.S. legal system so it unfairly targets people of color—

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<sup>36</sup> Suevon Lee, “By the Numbers: The U.S.’s Growing For-Profit Detention Industry,” *ProPublica*, June 20, 2012 <http://www.propublica.org/article/by-the-numbers-the-u.s.-growing-for-profit-detention-industry> (accessed February 2, 2013).

<sup>37</sup> Maschi, 258.

especially poor black men in urban ghettos—thereby creating a permanent underclass of future and former felons. Often denied voting rights, entrance to public housing projects, the opportunity to serve on juries, the ability to hold driver’s licenses, and certain welfare benefits, these people of color, permanently branded “criminal,” face a social and legal stigma leading to a life of poverty and despair. And the fact that many people of color have succeeded with the help of affirmative action policies—and that the U.S. elected its first black president—makes it harder to recognize that in this “colorblind” age, according to Alexander, “in many respects African Americans are doing no better than they were when Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated and riots swept inner cities across America.”<sup>38</sup>

The seeds of the peculiar form of contemporary segregation, Alexander posits, were sewn after Jim Crow laws were formally struck down by the Supreme Court in the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* case in 1954. Though the Court held separate-but-equal policies in reality discriminated against blacks, the South did not desegregate, which led civil rights reformers to protest and engage in civil disobedience—the beginnings of the modern Civil Rights movement. In response, “proponents of racial hierarchy found they could install a new racial caste system without violating the law or the new limits of acceptable political discourse, by demanding ‘law and order’ rather than ‘segregation forever.’”<sup>39</sup> In other words, political actions were branded criminal by their opponents. These “criminal” acts received a racial tinge throughout the 1960s, as blacks fought for civil rights and inner-city riots broke out in response to rising unemployment

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<sup>38</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: New Press, 2010), 246.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

rates and the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. “The racial imagery associated with the riots gave fuel to the argument that civil rights for blacks led to rampant crime,” and conservative politicians including Barry Goldwater, George Wallace and Richard Nixon campaigned on crack-down-on-crime tactics.<sup>40</sup>

The new, disguised Jim Crow, Alexander argues, gained full steam in the early 1980s with the election of Ronald Reagan, a master of evoking racist imagery without specifically mentioning race. He peppered his speeches with coded terms like “welfare queen” and “criminal ‘predator,’” raising specters of black miscreants and listless single mothers taking advantage of the system. “To great effect,” Alexander writes, “Reagan echoed white frustration in race-neutral terms through implicit racial appeals. His ‘color-blind’ rhetoric on crime, welfare, taxes, and states’ rights was clearly understood by white (and black) voters as having a racial dimension, though claims to that effect were impossible to prove.”<sup>41</sup>

Reagan’s launch of the War on Drugs in 1982, a continuation of the tough-on-crime stance of earlier conservatives, solidified the silent war on people of color, especially poor people of color. Three years before crack was introduced to inner-city neighborhoods, and just as unemployment in poor communities was skyrocketing because of the loss of manufacturing jobs (due to globalization and technological advances), the Justice Department de-funded initiatives to target white-collar crime and dramatically increased spending on enforcing drug laws.<sup>42</sup> In the ghetto, desperation over lack of economic opportunity made dealing drugs, especially the concentrated (and

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<sup>40</sup> Alexander, 41-42, 46.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 49-50.

therefore cheap) form of cocaine—crack—attractive. Coupled with a media blitz suggesting crack had become an uncontrollable inner-city epidemic, Congress reacted in draconian fashion, enlisting the military to participate in drug raids, authorizing capital punishment for some drug-related offenses, and allowing “the admission of some illegally obtained evidence in drug trials.”<sup>43</sup> Even as whites used and sold drugs including marijuana, powder cocaine, and ecstasy at the same rates as people of color, from the beginning of the drug war local, state and federal authorities avoided arresting whites *en masse* in their suburban neighborhoods and university dorms, and instead concentrated on the urban poor.<sup>44</sup> After Reagan left the White House, the administrations of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton continued the hard line on drugs and crime while simultaneously cutting welfare programs, including drug treatment services.<sup>45</sup> Comparing the War on Drugs as a tool of racial oppression to the backlash of Jim Crow laws after Reconstruction, Alexander writes:

Once again, in response to a major disruption in the prevailing racial order—this time the civil rights gains of the 1960s—a new system of racialized social control was created by exploiting the vulnerabilities and racial resentments of poor and working-class whites. More than 2 million people found themselves behind bars at the turn of the twenty-first century, and millions were relegated to the margins of mainstream society, banished to a political and social space not unlike Jim Crow, where discrimination in employment, housing, and access to education was perfectly legal, and where they could be denied the right to vote...Ninety percent of those admitted to prison for drug offenses in many states were black or Latino, yet the mass incarceration of communities of color was explained in race-neutral terms, an adaptation to the needs and demands of the current political climate.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Alexander, 52-53.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 124.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 53, 56.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 58.

There is much more to the story, including racial profiling through stop-and-frisk tactics, the erosion of Fourth Amendment protections from illegal search and seizures, and a series of Supreme Court decisions that has effectively barred anyone from suing the government for racial bias in policing and prosecuting.

In 1984, the U.S. government contracted out the complete operation of a jail to a private operator in Hamilton County, Tenn. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service also signed a contract with CCA for private detention services, marking the birth of the country's modern private prison industry. The number of persons held in private prisons increased by approximately 1,600 percent between 1990 and 2009.

Companies can now profit from public policies that lock up more people. In CCA's 2010 annual report filed with the Securities and Exchange Commission, it said:

The demand for our facilities and services could be adversely affected by the relaxation of enforcement efforts, leniency in conviction or parole standards and sentencing practices, or through the decriminalization of certain activities that are currently proscribed by our criminal laws. For instance, any changes with respect to drugs and controlled substances or illegal immigration could affect the number of persons arrested, convicted, and sentenced, thereby.<sup>47</sup>

Private prison proponents say their facilities are efficiently run and can save governments money, however, studies debate this. Some critics say cost savings come at the expense of those who are incarcerated and their security, opportunity for rehabilitation, and other quality-of-life issues. There is some evidence that private prisons keep only the lower-cost incarcerated, to make sure it is profitable. Religious institutions, denominations and organizations are taking a stand. "We believe that profiting from incarceration is contrary to church values," said a spokesperson from the United

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<sup>47</sup> Corrections Corporation of America, *CCA Annual Report 2010* (Nashville, TN: CCA, 2010).

Methodist Church. The Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) and the Catholic Bishops of the South have also called for a moratorium on construction of private prisons. The United Methodist Church divested almost \$1 million from private prisons earlier this year. The Catholic Bishops of the South specifically noted their concern about the rise in for-profit prisons “because previous attempts to introduce the profit motive into prisons have failed to respect the fundamental human dignity of every prisoner. Immediately following the abolition of slavery, Southern states developed the Convict Lease System, under which state and local governments contracted out prisoners as laborers on farms, roads, railroads, and mines. Widespread physical abuse and an extraordinary level of death among prisoners led to legislation declaring the commercial exploitation of prisoners illegal.”<sup>48</sup>

There is a conflict of interest at the very core of the for-profit prison industry whose profits hinge on high-occupancy prisons. Rehabilitation of incarcerated persons and preparation for reentry into society really don’t fit with their bottom line. These companies actually benefit from minimizing costs—such as staff and services—and relying on high rates of recidivism. A report from the University of Utah concluded that “cost savings from privatizing prisons are not guaranteed and appear minimal.”<sup>49</sup>

As great social change unfolded in the United States under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, with a new emphasis on reform and social responsibility which included funding aimed at preventing or addressing juvenile delinquency. The prototype was Columbia University School of Social Works initiative, New York City Mobilization for

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<sup>48</sup> Sheldon C. Good, “A Call to Conversion: Ex-offenders confront the for-profit industry,” *Sojourners*, December 2012, 26-28.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

Youth; it laid the groundwork for a multitude of similar programs to follow.<sup>50</sup> The executive director for The National Council on Crime and Delinquency was social worker Milton Rector who felt that probation officers should hold Master of Social Work degrees. At the same time federal dollars were also allocated to correctional treatment programs for adults, pre-trial diversion programs and 262 youth service bureaus. During this decade social workers worked in police departments, psychiatric settings, juvenile justice programs and at probation offices.<sup>51</sup>

In the early 1970s, Massachusetts social worker Jerome Miller created policy of moving youth from juvenile justice systems institutions to smaller, community based group homes which started a trend. In 1974 the passage of the Federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and Treatment Act (1974) appropriated funds for child abuse assessment and treatment teams, which were usually led by medical social workers.<sup>52</sup>

In 1973, the first shelter for women battered by their husbands opened in Arizona; later in the decade shelters for female victims and services for male perpetrators of family violence began to proliferate. Thus the focus on social responsibility that grew in the 1960s in the United States led to institutionalization of certain initial reforms in the rights of women and children at the federal level. These initiatives brought a renewed focus on victims' needs and rights to the forensic social work arena.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Maschi, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Karen S. Haynes, "The One Hundred-Year Debate: Social Reform Versus Individual Treatment," *Social Work* 43, no. 6 (November 1998): 501-509; Roberts, 359-369.

<sup>52</sup> Maschi, 13.

<sup>53</sup> Maschi, 17.



After increasingly widespread criticism, in 1979, the legislature amended the laws, increasing the amount of drugs, both sold and possessed, necessary for consideration for the 15-year to life sentence sale. However, a turnaround came in 1988 with the rise in popularity, and simultaneous increase of concern, of “crack cocaine.” The weight threshold used for cocaine possession was lowered, which resulted in the arrest and subsequent prosecution of people possessing very small amounts. Said turnaround came just two years after the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was established. The focus of the Anti-Drug Abuse Act was punishing, not rehabilitating and treating, users of street level drugs, in addition to a mandatory sentencing for crack cocaine possession.

### **A Shift From Social Reform To Individual Responsibility**

Corrections policies began to focus on “get tough on crime” initiatives in the 1980s. Prison populations grew rapidly, and program dollars were stretched thin. This evolution is visible in the statistics. For example, in the beginning of the decade, one in every seventy-seven adults in the U.S. was under correctional supervision—on parole, probation, or in prison or jail. By 1988, that number jumped to a staggering one out of every thirty-one adults. Many correctional administrators spent the majority of their budgets maintaining order and security in their institutions, leaving little funding for services. Feminists brought the impact of crime on survivors of domestic violence and rape to the national spotlight, highlighted by the landmark Victims of Crime Act (1984). The American public was not convinced that prisons were meeting the goal of reforming individuals and debated what to do in response to violent crime. Some called what

followed a “rage to punish,” as harsher sentencing and mandatory sentencing laws proliferated.<sup>54</sup>

The government took notice of the sentiment expressed by the American public. Shortly after the focus turned to individual responsibility and harsher punishments for more minor crimes, in 1992, the Federal Highway Appointments Act was put in place. This gave states a monetary incentive to suspend the driver’s licenses of those with minor drug offense convictions. One year later, the first “three strikes law” was passed in Washington State, launching the trend nationally. It wasn’t long before long sentences were required for minor crimes all across the U.S. Due to these laws, prisons were becoming more populated. In 1996, Congress passed a crucial act—the Prison Litigation Reform Act, which limits the ability of incarcerated individuals to gain access to federal courts, making it more difficult to leave. It was clear that the system was in a state of transition and change.

The United States began introspection on the point of prison systems. Was it correctional? Were they to protect the public from violence? Was it to make society feel better because we were punishing the “bad guys”?<sup>55</sup>

The concept of rehabilitation was diminished with the publication—and some would say misinterpretation—of Robert Martinson’s evaluation of reform programs, *What works?* Martinson was the last of three researchers to join the project. He published the results early and without his colleagues, stating that little proof existed to suggest that

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<sup>54</sup> Craig Haney and Philip Zimbardo, “The past and future of U.S. prison policy: Twenty-five years after the Stanford Prison Experiment,” *American Psychologist* 53, no. 7 (July 1998): 709-727.

<sup>55</sup> R. S. Gebelein, “The Rebirth of Rehabilitation: Promise and perils of drug courts,” in *Sentencing and corrections: Issues for the 21st century* (Washington, DC: National Institute of Justice, 2000).

rehabilitative programs are successful.<sup>56</sup> The conclusions were not as evident, when the full article was later published, suggesting that some efforts were effective under some conditions with some subsets of incarcerated persons. Still, this claim and its strong questioning of the efficacy of rehabilitation had an impact.

Consistently there is a shift of focus based on the political climate. Forensic social work opportunities shifted from prison-based rehabilitation to community-based victim/witness assistance programs operated largely by social workers.<sup>57</sup> Community based corrections initiatives, halfway programs and community courts all turned to social workers for their knowledge and experience. In the mid-1980s, the RESTTA initiative—*Restitution, Education, Specialized Training, and Technical Assistance* was funded. This program of the Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) offered different possibilities to work with juvenile offenders.<sup>58</sup> Projects seek accountability through early intervention for high risk young offenders. The success of these programs is unclear which has affected their support.<sup>59</sup>

## **After 9-11**

The crimes that occurred in the United States September 11, 2001 and the numerous local, state, and federal laws and justice policies that followed are creating a new chapter in forensic policy and incarceration. Former President George W. Bush's "War on Terror" led to many new laws, perhaps the most significant of which was the

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<sup>56</sup> Robert Martinson, "What works? Questions and answers about prison reform," *Public Interest* 35 (1974): 22-54; Dana Wilks, "Revisiting Martinson: Has Corrections Made Progress In The Past 30 Years?" *Corrections Today* 66, no. 6 (October 2004): 108-111.

<sup>57</sup> Robert L. Barker and Douglas M. Branson, *Forensic Social Work: Legal Aspects of Professional Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Haworth Press, 2000); Roberts, 359-369.

<sup>58</sup> Roberts, 359.

<sup>59</sup> Maschi, 18.

*Patriot Act: Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism* passed on October 26, 2001, then revised and reauthorized in March 2006. Although much of the act focuses on international security concerns, domestic policies have shifted as well, affecting immigrants, refugees and those seeking asylum.<sup>60</sup>

### **Contemporary Issues in Corrections and Social Work**

The 400-year history of jails, prisons, penitentiaries and the accompanying 200-year history of forensic social work brings us to a set of contemporary issues and challenges. These are the dynamics within which the Coming Home program at RCB exists. Our church, nor our program, exists in a vacuum. Society is grappling with these questions. We hope to play an important part in the struggle.

### **Reentry**

Every year, some 700,000 men and women finish their prison sentences and return to their communities. Prison reentry has begun to receive national attention from policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.<sup>61</sup> Scholars have examined the factors correlated with recidivism;<sup>62</sup> the causes of desistance;<sup>63</sup> and what is referred to as the

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<sup>60</sup> Maschi, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Joan Petersilia, *When Prisoners Come Home: Parole and Prisoner Reentry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); Jeremy Travis, *But They All Come Back: Facing The Challenges of Prisoner Reentry* (Washington DC: The Urban Institute, 2005).

<sup>62</sup> Patrick Langan and David Levin, *Recidivism in Prisoners Released in 1994* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2002).

<sup>63</sup> Peggy C. Giordano, Stephen A. Cernkovich and Jennifer L. Rudolph, "Gender, Crime, and Desistance: Toward a Theory of Cognitive Transformation," *American Journal of Sociology* 107, no 4 (January 2002): 990–1064; John H. Laub and Robert J. Sampson, *Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives: Delinquent Boys to age 70* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003); Shadd Maruna, *Making Good: How Ex-Convicts Reform and Rebuild Their Lives* (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2001).

collateral consequences of imprisonment,” including voter disenfranchisement<sup>64</sup> limited options for employment,<sup>65</sup> and impact on family and community<sup>66</sup> Attention to prisoner reentry is clearly justified: Except for those who die while they are incarcerated, every person who is sent to prison experiences reentry—the process of leaving prison and returning to society.

The needs of returning citizens are critical. Those with mental health issues are in particular need of help and in addition, perceived as undesirable by many social service agencies and communities. This is incredibly unfortunate, given that in 2004, 73% of women and 55% of men in state prisons were either identified as having, or experiencing symptoms of, mental illnesses and/or were receiving treatment for mental illness. We have uncovered at RCB that even the most high-functioning individuals released from prison have experienced trauma and it is apparent in behaviors. Likewise, individuals with addictions often struggle to stay clean and sober after release from enforced abstinence. Those who have been convicted for violent offenses or for sex offenses are feared and sometimes hated regardless of time served to pay for their wrongdoing. Even at the church, where we are called to welcome everyone, we were not permitted to accept certain offenders into the program.

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<sup>64</sup> Marc Mauer and Meda Chesney Lind, *Invisible Punishment: The Collateral Consequences of Mass Imprisonment* (New York: New Press, 2002).

<sup>65</sup> Devah Pager, “The Mark of a Criminal Record,” *American Journal of Sociology* 108, no. 5 (March 2003): 957–975.

<sup>66</sup> Creasia Finney Hairston and James Rolling, “Social Capital and Family Connections,” *Women, Girls, and Criminal Justice* 4, no. 5 (2003), 67-69; J. Travis and C. Visser, “Prisoner Reentry and the Pathways to Adulthood: Policy Perspectives,” in D. Wayne Osgood, E. Michael Foster, Constance Flanagan and Gretchen R. Ruth, eds. *On Your Own Without a Net: The Transition to Adulthood for Vulnerable Populations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

Studies of motivational interviewing<sup>67</sup> have much to offer as a means of working with people to resolve ambivalence about making necessary changes in their lives. We have begun to include trauma informed care and motivational interview skills to the training we give to prepare RCB congregants with their work with returning citizens.

Travis suggests five principles for reentry to be effective. These include: preparation for reentry, building bridges between prisons and communities, seizing the moment of release, strengthening the circles of support, and promoting successful reintegration. Returning citizens will need a lot of community support, resources and policy changes if they are to be successfully absorbed into the community.

### **Changing Roles For Forensic Social Work**

Since the beginning of forensic social work we've seen a transition from public displays of torture to private detention with rehabilitation playing a major role in modern justice. Now, along with direct services and support for incarcerated individuals, and an activists' stature in working for policy reform, forensic social work has to engage with many other actors. Social work needs to interact with the education system, the legal system and adapt its advocacy skills to the new worlds of global technology communications and information-sharing. The profession (like the congregation at RCB) needs to use its considerable experience and resources to identify and influence the root causes of crime. It needs to take a proactive and prescriptive role in trying to reduce the size of the U.S. prison population.

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<sup>67</sup> A. S. Bellack, M. E. Bennett J. S. Gearon, C. H. Brown, and Y. Yang, "A randomized clinical trial of a new behavioral treatment for drug abuse in people with severe and persistent mental illness," *Archives of General Psychiatry* 63 (2006),426-432.

## **Emphasis On Victims: Restorative Justice**

One of the most challenging issues in contemporary criminal justice is the need to find balance between concern for the accused, and the harm done to the victim. In chapter 4 I make the case that this is also an important Christian issue. We work very hard to protect the rights of the accused. “Innocent until proved guilty” is a cornerstone of our justice system. Little time or attention is given to the impact of the crime on the victim, the victim’s family, the accused’s family or the communities from which they come.

Confessions are evaluated as to whether they were coerced or obtained in violation of Miranda rights, rather than whether they are honest acknowledgments of culpability. Rules of evidence are used to exclude a person’s statement of remorse because it is irrelevant to guilt or innocence. Feelings of terror and grief are hidden from jurors because they might inflame passions. Cross-examination picks apart details and seeks to belittle and humiliate victims. There is little opportunity for a victim and accused person to see and have empathy for each other as human beings, each of whom has experienced pain.

The process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as depicted in *Long Night’s Journey into Day* is a very different approach to criminal justice. It’s a restorative justice model where the primary focus was on the victim as well as the perpetrator of violence. Both were invited to voluntarily tell their stories fully and freely to the Commission. Justice became synonymous with complete disclosure and taking of responsibility. Indeed, no rules of evidence constrained witnesses before the TRC. One Commissioner, for instance, invited the testimony of an elderly woman whose son had been murdered, by saying, “I wonder if you would like to tell us what is on your heart.”

The point of inviting the victim's story was not merely to punish the perpetrator. As Archbishop Desmond Tutu stated, "This process is not about pillorying anybody. It's not about persecuting anybody. It's ultimately about getting to the truth so that we can help to heal. And also so that we may know what to avoid in the future."<sup>68</sup> The goal of the process is reconciliation—for the victim, perpetrator, and all of society—not merely punishment.

Our criminal justice system isn't creating communities in which citizens feel safe, victims of crime are treated with dignity, the accused and victims are reconciled, and people are held accountable and reintegrated back into society as productive citizens.

Some jurisdictions have adopted restorative justice programs, such as victim-offender mediation, court-ordered apology, victim impact statements at the time of sentencing, restitution for economic loss, and service to the victim and/or community. But restorative justice requires more than just innovative programs. It requires a reorientation of the community and the criminal justice system so that victim and accused person are seen as part of the same social fabric. Justice is achieved when the victim's loss is publicly acknowledged, the offender is held accountable, the community is involved in healing and reintegrating both back into their common society, and the same commitment is made to healing victims as to punishing defendants."<sup>69</sup>

### **Toward Conflict Resolution**

Violence is never desirable but not all conflict is bad. If those who are oppressed and their allies do not resist the injustice, the situation may not improve. In the case

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<sup>68</sup> Pamela Harris, ed., *Long Night's Journey into Day: South Africa's Search for Truth and Reconciliation* (Berkeley, CA: Iris Films, 2000), 26-27.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.



where there is a gross disparity in wealth and power, the absence of resistance is a likely measure of the power of the repression. Or as the great abolitionist Frederick Douglass once wrote, “Power concedes nothing without demand. It never has, and it never will.” It is important to recognize conflict resolution as not just an elimination of social conflicts, but also as a way to channel those conflicts constructively so that lasting positive outcomes can be achieved.

Working within the framework of a “powerful” congregation, I hold onto the hope that faith and morals may also be a catalyst of change. Indeed I’m fortunate enough to work with a handful of individuals, who inspire me with their model of Christian service and attitude and restore my beliefs about change.

There are many models of conflict resolution strategy. My faith and my profession set me against the use of force and “stabilization” by the winner. Instead, I want to work for collaborative discussions and solutions, arbitration, mediation, the use of the vote, changes in public policy, peaceful and non-violent actions and demonstrations, mutually-beneficial treaties and agreements. This emphasis on conflict resolution is at the core of my support for the Coming Home ministry and the potential for an increasingly active role by the RCB congregation.

One of the most compelling and catalytic examples of an entire society coming to grips with these issues is the South Africa Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). In South Africa, the same process that generated wealth and a high standard of living for whites created black poverty and underdevelopment. Members of the white minority used state force, power and resources to enrich themselves, while systematically denying equal education, employment opportunities, health care, housing, land title and other basic

democratic rights—even citizenship—to blacks. Blacks had no rights that white South Africans were bound to respect.

TRC Vice Chair Alex Boraine has said:

Reconciliation is moral imperative and practical necessity, if we are to live in stability and peace. But reconciliation cannot be insisted upon...To hold out forgiveness as a choice is different...We have people seeking to forego bitterness, renounce resentment, move beyond old pain and hurt, and, in so doing, they have become victors and survivors rather than passive victims...Reconciliation comes at a price. It is never cheap. It is always costly, and it is always painful.<sup>70</sup>

Through truth-telling, the TRC helped to purge South Africans of the ignorance, denial, pain, anger, violence, hatred and division that would rob the fledgling republic of the unity and stability needed to create a shared and workable future for all, irrespective of race. The TRC could not, however, dismantle the institutional practices, inequality and black poverty that are apartheid's legacy. These gross disparities continue to generate societal conflict at all levels in South Africa. Redress lies ahead.

The TRC example provides Americans with much food for thought; the lessons to be drawn from the South African experience are many. To me, the most powerful is that wherever and whenever the basic human rights of human beings are violated, conflict is set in motion. Oppression breeds resistance. Violence begets violence. Guilty and innocent people suffer. Whether a person is hailed as a hero or condemned as a murderer is often a thin line. "Where we stand, more often than not, depends upon where we sit. The challenge we face is to become bigger than ourselves."<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Harris, *Long Nights Journey into Day*, 30.

<sup>71</sup> Harris, 28-29.

Small RJ experiments are happening now in our country. Mayor Bloomberg has decided to tackle young offenders in NYC away from the criminal justice system. I have faith in his commitment after witnessing his extermination of smoking in much of NYC. The response to *The New Jim Crow* by Michelle Alexander, the fact that the Democratic and Republican agenda overlap on prison closures, the Manhattan Institutes dedication to repair the financial mess and create a sustainable budget, the response of the RCB community to our CH prison ministry are all providing hope for me. It is clearer than ever to me the need for social workers and people of faith to continue engage in our criminal justice system.

A two-pronged approach—with equal attention to the individual and the social conditions that impact on individuals and families—is captured in the mission statement of the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1996):

The mission of social work is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed and living in society. A historic and defining feature of social work is the professions focus on individual well-being in a social context and the well-being of society. Fundamental to social work is the attention to environmental forces that create, contribute, and address problems in living.<sup>72</sup>

This sounds familiar to me, a lot like reading the Scriptures. The approach is also echoed in this definition of social work (*Social Work Dictionary*): an “applied science of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning and effecting societal changes to enhance the wellbeing of all people.<sup>73</sup>” Consequently, social work practitioners target their interventions at the micro level (e.g. individuals), the mezzo

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<sup>72</sup> National Association of Social Workers, “Code of Ethics of the National Association of Social Workers,” <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp> (accessed February 5, 2013).

<sup>73</sup> Barker, 408.

level (e.g., families and groups), and/or the macro level (e.g., institutions, organizations, cultures and communities).<sup>74</sup> Miley, O'Meila, and Dubois outlined four major goals for practice addressing multilevel assessment and intervention strategies. These four goals are:

1. enhancing people's individual functioning, problem solving, and coping abilities;
2. linking clients to needed resources;
3. working to develop and improve the social service delivery network;
4. promoting social justice through the development of social policy<sup>75</sup>

These goals seem to me also priorities of a person of faith who recognizes the Divine in each human and seeks to empower all individuals to share their gifts in the world, build supportive community and work for justice.

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<sup>74</sup> Charles Zastrow and Karen Kay Kirst-Ashman, *Understanding human behavior and the social environment* (Chicago: Nelson-Hall Publishers, 2004), 49.

<sup>75</sup> Karla Krogsrud Miley, Michael O'Melia and Brenda DuBois, *Generalist Social Work Practice An Empowering Approach* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2007).

### CHAPTER 3 WHAT OTHERS HAVE DONE

“Go out and preach the Gospel always, and if you must, use words.”  
St. Frances of Assisi

#### DARRYL

*Imagine being incarcerated for 27 years, and through it all, your partner stands by you with visits, phone calls, loyalty. That’s Darryl’s story. His wife Jaquie did it all while he was away, keeping the household together, and waiting, waiting.*

*When Darryl (a former Coming Home participant) was released, he wanted to catch up, take on his responsibilities as a citizen and a wage-earner. But things didn’t go well. Jaquie was used to running the house on her own, and didn’t welcome Darryl’s ideas. And it was hard for him to be the “man of the house” after all those years away, and without bringing in much money.*

*In spite of health challenges, Darryl began graduate social work school. A marriage therapist from RCB worked with the couple for a while. We touched based regularly. When Darryl and Jacquie separated, he came back to a church service looking for a supportive community. He found what he came for, some spiritual nourishment at worship, a chat with the Marriage therapist at coffee hour, and the interest and concern of congregants who were happy to see him.*

*In these circumstances, someone in Darryl’s situation might feel unmoored, adrift, defeated. But he chose to reconnect with the CH family at RCB.*

*Darryl left that church service with a carful of things—a bag of groceries, a suit, and something much more durable. He left with bridges and lifelines rebuilt and revitalized, with a sense of support and encouragement, to travel the unknown path ahead. Darryl told us that prayer and trust in the CH experience brought him back.*

In this chapter, I report on programs and initiatives that offer parallels to our Coming Home at RCB. I was unable to find prison ministries in the NY area that were comparable to ours but certainly came across many churches and organizations doing important impactful work to learn from and strive for.

I have a belief that faith communities are called to engage not only in direct service but also to systemic change. In my experience, opportunities for both within a congregation inform one another and attract different volunteers.

A classic story which I have shared with RCB:

### **THE BABIES IN THE RIVER:**

Once upon a time there was a small village on the edge of a river. The people there were good and life in the village was good. One day a villager noticed a baby floating down the river. The villager quickly swam out to save the baby from drowning. The next day this same villager noticed two babies in the river. He called for help, and both babies were rescued from the swift waters. And the following day four babies were seen caught in the turbulent current. And then eight, then more, and still more!

The villagers organized themselves quickly, setting up watchtowers and training teams of swimmers who could resist the swift waters and rescue babies. Rescue squads were soon working 24 hours a day. And each day the number of helpless babies floating down the river increased. The villagers organized themselves efficiently. The rescue squads were now snatching many children each day. While not all the babies, now very numerous, could be saved, the villagers felt they were doing well to save as many as they could each day. Indeed, the village priest blessed them in their good work. And life in the village continued on that basis.

One day, however, someone raised the question, ‘But where are all these babies coming from? Let’s organize a team to head upstream to find out who’s throwing all of these babies into the river in the first place!’<sup>76</sup>

Often direct service is the entry point of engagement. The danger is that people are satisfied with this important work which is dealing with the symptoms and don’t do more to address the root causes of problems. We need to do both. When you really love someone, you don’t hand them a sandwich and a blanket and leave them on the street unless that’s where they want to be.

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<sup>76</sup> [www.rmccmc.org/MI/Justice/Parable\\_of\\_the\\_River.doc](http://www.rmccmc.org/MI/Justice/Parable_of_the_River.doc) [www.rmccmc.org](http://www.rmccmc.org).

We need to help each other be fully functioning in the world. Ultimately if we aren't all using our gifts in the world, we all suffer.

Numerous opportunities for prison ministry exist. I tend to favor holistic and community approaches that build relationships, include individual empowerment but also address the root causes of problems through education, community organizing, and political advocacy. A variety of programs, offering a variety of approaches exist in the surrounding region. Among them are: Rye Presbyterian Church, Healing Communities; Riverside Church Prison Ministry; Church of Gethsemane; Greyston Bakery and Foundation; Hour Children; Fresh Start; NYTS MPS; Correctional Association; Catholic Campaign for Human Development; and the Prison Partnership of Hudson River Presbytery. Others that I surveyed include: Prison Fellowship; Angel Tree; Delancey Street; National Reentry Resource Center; Public / Private Ventures; Prison Mindfulness Institute; College Initiative; Harlem Community Justice Center; Kairos Prison Ministries; Abraham House; Liberty Ministries; Strength to Love; and The Forgiveness Project

But they are all good! I believe what is most important is that individuals and communities have an opportunity to minister in a way that feels authentic and life giving for them.

Among the programs and resources that I appreciated the most, I visited:

**Rye Presbyterian Church** is a church comparable to RCB with a history of active prison ministry work. They generously give to organizations that provide education inside correctional facilities or support returning citizens. Their hands follow their dollars as they engage in relationships with folks affected by incarceration. They organize volunteers and run groups inside facilities as well as host a Sisters' Circle for

women who have a loved one who is or was in prison. Nancy and Bob Steed are committed lay leaders who organize about 30 volunteers and are responsible for most of the success of this work. They kindly and generously offered their guidance as we began the ministry at RCB, and offered extra support as we attempted to replicate a variation of their Church and Justice Sunday Service. Rye Presbyterian Church is a model that all comparable churches should strive for.

Of the programs I surveyed, **Healing Communities** is to me among the most appealing of those implemented within a church community, although not RCB at this time. The philosophy of neighbor helping neighbor within a supportive community is what my life mission has been about. Healing Communities reach out to everyone affected by a crime within the context of community. Space for healing is encouraged for victims of crimes as well as perpetrators. The Healing Communities map out an amazing program, including inspiring stories of healing, facts about the criminal justice system, and tools to mobilize and prepare a congregation. It has manuals, “The Do’s and Dont’s of Mentoring,” internet resources, a tool kit. I believe every community should be doing this and reaching out to one another. Although the term “restorative justice” or “transformational justice” is not used within the material, I believe “Healing Communities” creates such a model.

An obstacle to creating a healing community at RCB is that embedded in RCB culture is an ideal to be “perfect,” and therefore sharing personal and family struggles is often concealed while your “best face” is put forward. Expectations are high, and individuals and families often are very cautious about sharing many of the things we all encounter: relationship problems, divorce, drug or alcohol abuse or addiction, economic



struggles, etc. This makes me so sad. So often I have heard the story of a parent struggling with a child who is using drugs or is gay. I hear the pain of an isolated person who shares in confidence. I always encourage them to talk to friends but it doesn't seem safe to many, although I may be hearing the same story from their friend. The pastoral staff is making an effort to create safety and to develop a more sharing community that does not turn only to the pastors to provide all the pastoral care. My boss describes it as a "slow turning ship." This attitude is deeply ingrained within the culture.

So this particular "Healing Communities" model is not a "fit" for Bronxville at the moment. If Bronxville residents are returning from prison (to date I have met only one person who shared that they were returning from a federal prison) then they are not sharing it. A member of my site team said that if someone from Bronxville goes to prison it's more like a country club. Although it's likely that race and class play into this, it is easy to see that the financial and social capital allow for prevention as well as the best legal counsel available in order to avoid prison.

I learned about Healing Communities through NYTS and Jacqueline McLeod. Jacqui is an extraordinarily inspiring model of strength as she spearheads prison ministry in the name of her late husband Ronnie McLeod. At Riverside Church where Jacqui belongs they have a history of prison ministry and are currently in the process of replicating our CH program with an extraordinary lay leader, John Delf. The **Riverside Church Prison Ministry** is an organization of volunteers that conducts advocacy and outreach programs on behalf of people in prison, their families and the communities from which most come and to which most return. The volunteers—lay people, community workers, students, family members and people formerly incarcerated—work inside the

prisons as well as on the outside worshipping, assisting families and sponsoring prison reform.

The program at Riverside includes a number of initiatives both inside and outside the prison: there are prison worship services all across NY State; an attempt to connect people inside with their families and communities outside; lobbying, advocacy and public information sessions to encourage more humane prisons and a more caring criminal justice policy; ongoing programs of correspondence with incarcerated individuals; gift drives; and Bible study groups and more.

The **Church of Gethsemane** presents itself as welcoming, diverse and inclusive. The Church features a unique intentional congregation of persons from all racial, ethnic, economic and educational backgrounds. As the Church says about itself, “founded in 1986 as a New Church Development and established as a church in 1989, The Church of Gethsemane is a congregation of The Presbyterian Church (USA) created by and for incarcerated persons, formerly incarcerated persons, their families, neighborhood persons, and people who feel called into ministry with the poor.”

The Church of Gethsemane is a More Light Presbyterian Church and a member of New York City’s Presbyterian Welcome. Gay men, lesbians, bisexual and transgender persons are welcomed there. All members of the church have an equal opportunity to serve as ordained leaders in the congregation.

An extraordinary social enterprise, right in Yonkers, RCB’s backyard, is the **Greyston Bakery and Foundation**. I’m attracted to Greyston because of its business and training model offering skills and opportunity for residents while providing the wrap-around services to support them while they develop these skills. It is founded by Bernie

Glassman, a hero of mine, and leader of Zen Peacemakers. Greyston is rooted in two important Buddhist concepts: the mandala, representing the wholeness of life, and the path, which speaks to transformation. Greyston is a community development program that creates entrepreneurship opportunities and employment ladders, offers comprehensive social and community services, and operates a profitable bakery (“we make brownies in order to hire people”). This for-profit bakery is successful largely due to Ben and Jerry’s, who is committed to purchasing all of the brownies for their products through Greyston. Greyston is addressing many of the root causes of incarceration—beginning with employment options and opportunities. In addition, the interlocked profit and nonprofit structures deliver housing assistance, child care, health and afterschool services and much more. The Greyston model emphasizes the growth and independence of the individual, as an essential element of the security and stability of the entire community.

**Hour Children** is the best and most comprehensive reentry work that I’ve been lucky enough to see. I loved Sr. Tesa and her entire operation. As she brought me around the facilities we were interrupted along the way by many residents and families who have moved on from Hour Children, but were staying connected. She knew what was going on in each of their lives and clearly had built caring relationships with the families. I was so moved. I wished we could partner with Hour Children but it is in Queens and we have learned that it’s much better to work with those in close proximity if we expect relationships to build with congregants. Hour Children’s mission is to help incarcerated and formerly incarcerated women and their children successfully rejoin the community, reunify with their families, and build healthy, independent and secure lives. To

accomplish this, Hour Children provides compassionate and comprehensive services and encourages all to live and interact with dignity and respect. Hour Children's vision is to break the cycle of intergenerational incarceration. Hour Children's Core Values shape the organizational culture and guide interactions, work and decision making.

Their beliefs include: the capacity of all persons to change for the better; diversity, staff and residents with diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, beliefs, perspectives, and lifestyles; the inherent worth of all human beings; that all persons deserve to be treated with dignity and respect; diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, beliefs, perspectives, and lifestyles. All programs, communications, and everyday interactions affirm the dignity, potential, and contribution of all participants, board, donors, staff, volunteers, partners and larger community fostering an environment in which participants and staff are held accountable for their actions will lead to more effective programs and better outcomes

Hour Commitment Starts Inside with a presence and services inside the prisons and jails providing hope, encouragement, and support, leading to a more successful transition into the community and better outcomes for our participants.

Children are a priority and staff work closely with each mother, tracking her progress or addressing problems with obtaining a job, managing a household, and caring for her children.

During their time at Hour Children, women complete their education, obtain marketable job skills, and learn home and financial management skills—to do the most with the resources that they have. Hour Children also maintains relationships with

community organizations that can facilitate job placement. When “Hour” women are ready, they also help secure affordable housing.

**Fresh Start** is a program of Osborne Association Jail-Based Services held inside Rikers Island. The program offers an opportunity for participants to change the way they think and behave, improve their employability, grow as parents and reconnect to their families, and return home with a viable plan to stay home.

Fresh Start’s 10 week curriculum of courses include cognitive behavioral therapy, culinary arts training and food handlers certification, relapse prevention, parenting education, job readiness, discharge planning, job referral and placement, and ongoing case management. This thoughtful combination of interventions is targeted specifically at factors known to reduce recidivism.

Fresh Start participants also learn about the importance of making amends and giving back to the community which was highlighted in many newspapers this year during Thanksgiving when participants prepared turkey dinners for many people in need in New York. My experience participating in a few of the classes was eye opening for me. In one exercise each of us had to introduce ourselves using a positive adjective that shared the same letter as our first name. It was easy for me to choose Determined Dawn, but I saw how many people struggled to describe themselves positively. Video clips were used with messages from Osborne Association Executive Director Liz Gaynes. Workbooks were used that took us through an exercise to explore limiting beliefs we each hold. And later we had a discussion about whether it is better to be respected or feared. I attended two of the Fresh Start graduations which truly honor the hard work of graduates. Family members, elected officials, prison staff, religious leaders and

supporters are invited to attend. The two most unforgettable moments for me are the valedictorian speech and the words of encouragement from the former graduate.

Another favorite of mine is the **New York Theological Seminary, Masters of Professional Studies**, an accredited 36 hour master's degree program inside Sing Sing. Classes given include Bible studies, history, theology, ethics, ministry and others. There is an integration of theory and practice emphasizing critical thinking and reflection. I've benefitted from the accomplished professionals and leaders the program produces as many have been collaborators in our CH program and also served as mentors to me in the development of this ministry. It seems that RCB would do well to work alongside NYTS to provide volunteers, resources and perhaps a welcoming community when graduates are returning. Perhaps we can work with Rye Presbyterian and build relationships on the inside for more effective reentry on the outside.

**The Correctional Association of New York** is a non-profit organization and was created in 1844 by distressed community members. The New York State Legislature allowed the members of The Correctional Association of New York to go to prisons and perform inspections, which they would later share with the State Legislature, general public, and news sources. They would also give suggestions on ways to improve. I had the privilege to lobby with The Correctional Association of New York in Albany the fall of 2012. The topics of discussion were parole reform, work release and prison closures. Correctional Association also assisted me through a great challenge when there was opposition to our advocacy day. They helped me to strategize and compile data to engage disgruntled congregants through use of the "Manhattan Institute's" position on prison closures in response to the economic crisis. Congregants knew the author of the proposal

and since there was an overlap of both the Democratic and Republican agenda at this moment in time, this greatly eased the situation.

**Catholic Campaign for Human Development (CCHD)** is the domestic anti-poverty program of the U.S. Catholic Bishops and works to break the cycle of poverty by helping low-income people participate in decisions that affect their lives, families and communities. CCHD offers a hand up, not a hand out.

It has a complementary mission of educating on poverty and its causes. This dual pastoral strategy of education for justice and helping people who are poor speak and act for themselves reflects the mandate of the Scriptures and the principles of Catholic social teaching. CCHD is close to my heart as I was part of a project that worked alongside CCHD to ease the political upheaval in Glen Cove, LI when there was an influx of new immigrants.

The **Prison Partnership of Hudson River Presbytery** is a program that closely follows the teachings of Jesus Christ, who decreed freedom for all those imprisoned in a cell or imprisoned by their minds. The Prison Partnership works throughout Hudson River Presbytery to create caring and passionate congregations by informing them about issues in the state criminal justice system, sharing personal accounts, and also interacting with formerly incarcerated individuals in order to open minds, build relationships, breakdown

**Prison Fellowship** aims to provide all those who have been touched in some way, shape, or form by the prison system with the love of God since 1976. This includes, not just those who are incarcerated, but encouragement for their families, as well. Prison Fellowship provides churches and volunteers in many communities with the materials

needed to share the Word of God both inside and outside prisons. The intent is by encouraging Christianity, the incarcerated individuals will become leaders in all areas of their lives and stay away from a life of crime and further incarceration.

**Angel Tree** is a ministry to children of incarcerated adults through **Prison Fellowship**. The program enables church communities to purchase a gift on behalf of an incarcerated parent. The child receives the gift with a note from their parent. Building these relationships between parent and child are crucial for the well-being of the family, and building these relationships helps reduce recidivism. For many years Angel Tree ran under my direction as church leadership. I was responsible to collect and deliver gifts. I never understood the impact this program could have until I became involved with the Coming Home Prison ministry at RCB. With full disclosure, I'd like to acknowledge that I've been resistant to the evangelical approach that Prison Fellowship takes in bringing the Gospel to folks in a way that I have seen hurt people. Although I have a deep faith and calling to live the Gospel I aim to engage in relationships where the Gospel is preached through actions, opening the door for deeper exploration and also because I believe Jesus' message is one of inclusivity and love and compassion for all.

San Francisco's **Delancey Street** has been operating a program for 40 years. It's not thought of as 'reentry,' but rather a residential education center for people struggling with addiction and returning citizens which is run by formerly incarcerated folks also in recovery. My dream is that such a creation will be an outcome of our current CH program. A community beyond treatment, members are put to work helping one another learning and sharing skills.<sup>77</sup> There are no paid professional social workers or guards and

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<sup>77</sup> James Tracy, "Recipes for Recovery," *Yes! Magazine*, Jun 24, 2011.



little bureaucracy, yet this program has successfully kept thousands of people struggling with addiction and ex-offenders from landing back in prison. Residents learn at least three marketable job skills through Delancey's business enterprises, all of them run by formerly incarcerated folks. There's an on-site restaurant, a moving company, a Christmas tree sales lot, landscape business and digital print shop. The enterprises supply roughly 60 percent of Delancey's funding. In my view, Delancey Street has been successful by challenging folks to take maximum responsibility within supportive community and mutual aid. Individuals learn that they have value and can make and do things that are of value to others.

In my research, I came to know and appreciate the work of the **National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC)**. The Center was created in 2008 by the U.S. Department of Justice. Programs of the NRRC are intended to support the emerging and complex field of reentry, through information and "best-practice" models. This means that the Center works with many actors and constituencies in the field of reentry: prisons and corrections systems, direct service providers, state and local government, nonprofits and many more.

An organization that has gone out of business, but left a valuable legacy of research and case studies, is **Public/Private Ventures**. PPV has had many resources for reentry and mentor information that I've been able to use for training church folks. The reports and studies left by PPV will remain an important resource for our programs, and for similar programs, thanks to the archival skills and commitment of the Foundation Center's IssueLab.

**Prison Mindfulness Institute (PMI)** is another program that resonated with me. Their mission is to heal lives and transform society by providing high quality,

scientifically proven, mindfulness-based programs and training for prisoners, prison staff and volunteers. They also promote traditional meditation and movement practices from the world's greatest contemplative traditions as ideal means for rehabilitation and personal transformation. Some of their projects are:

- Books Behind Bars: 45,000 books have been distributed about contemplative practice since 1989
- Path to Freedom program is mindfulness-based emotional intelligence (MBEI) approach to rehabilitation and personal transformation for incarcerated and at risk youth and adults.

PMI was started 23 years ago as Prison Dharma Network by Fleet Maull—from his prison cell. He has successfully made contemplative practices available to many prisoners throughout the US but believes that only a small percentage of the prison population will ever access faith-based services so is making changes to impact more folks. (Although a study in Oregon presents evidence of a pervasive role of spirituality in the lives of inmates. A Correctional Service Canada survey that found 91 percent of male inmates and 87 percent of female inmates say they would like to avail themselves of faith based help in the community during their reentry.<sup>78</sup> The ten year goal is to establish secular, mindfulness-based interventions as best practices in mainstream correctional programs for both prisoners and staff. PMI practices integral transformative justice, an alternative to the dominant retributive model, using body, mind, emotions, heart, and spirit, holistically.

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<sup>78</sup> Thomas P. O'Connor et al., "Home for Good in Oregon," *Corrections Today*, 73.

PMI has launched a 5 year research study in Rhode Island to establish mindfulness-based interventions as evidence based practice in corrections to demonstrate a positive system wide-impact by providing mindfulness-based emotional intelligence (MBEI) training to prisoners and staff.

Their most recent undertaking is a Center for Mindfulness in Corrections (CMC) which is engaged in research, development and implementation of evidence-based practices for staff development and correctional management designed to promote professionalism, excellence and staff wellness. They also include resources (books, audio tapes, CDs, downloadable meditation kits) to prison chaplains and libraries.

Some resources that I found on the internet and haven't met with in person yet include:

**College Initiative (CI)** is another useful model. CI is a “responsive, problem-solving organization” that utilizes a layered, in-depth foundation and strategies to help ensure that all clientele has access to support and higher education. CI does this by creating and maintaining connections, both personal and professional, that support the students as they explore and transition into the world of higher learning. The leaders of the College Initiative are predominantly previously incarcerated students, collegiate and university faculty members, peer mentors, and CI staff. The College Initiative's objective is to help young adults put their incarceration in the past and look to a future in college. CI recruits members through an outreach and recruitment process which includes presentations at correctional facilities and constant contact with those nearing release. There is also an orientation process, an assessment, college prep and scholastic/social

tutoring, financial aid counseling, scholarships, mentoring, and a database full of useful resources.

An effective community-centered model is the **Harlem Community Justice Center**. The program works with parolees to help them with the difficult transition from prison to life “outside.” Participants can call on a number of essential services and supports—employment and vocational assistance, drug treatment, health care and more. The Center requires people on parole to show up, meet with staff and parole officers, and maintain compliance with court orders (this is managed by appearances before an administrative law judge). The mission of the Center is to help returning citizens avoid the behaviors that might lead them to commit new crimes and return to prison.

**Kairos Prison Ministry** is an all-inclusive, global Christian prison ministry organization led by non-clerical individuals. Kairos volunteers embrace the teachings of Christ, and shower incarcerated individuals and their family members with love and compassion. There are three Kairos programs—Kairos Inside, Kairos Outside, and Kairos Torch. The Kairos motto is, “Changing Hearts, Transforming Lives, Impacting the World.” They achieve this by loving, caring and acting mercifully towards the participants at the first Kairos Weekend. Volunteers also check in regularly with the participants after the commencement weekend to provide support and counsel when needed, and encourage participants to attend accountability groups. The groups are meant to give participants hope and faith for their futures and the future of their families. All of this helps lower the amount of violence in the prison community, and once the participants are released, they go forth with faith and love as dynamic members of society. There is also support for female relatives and young offenders.

**Abraham House**—which began in 1993, is located in Mott Haven, in the South Bronx and works with those who have been or are incarcerated and their families, providing them with support and services. One of the biggest efforts to come from Abraham House is the “Alternative to Incarceration” program which rehabilitates first-time offenders (of non-violent crimes) for 1-3 years. This program promotes accountability within the individual, giving him or her hope for the future, but also advocates for, and supports the family of, the individual. Abraham House also offers an After-School Program for children, in order to keep them in a safe place and out of harm’s way—a preventative program. Everything being done at Abraham House is for one purpose—to change the cycle that has plagued the area for too long. The Mott Haven neighborhood is a “pipeline to prison” and Abraham House is working to change that.

Although Abraham House is a non-denominational, all-inclusive haven, there is a Pastoral Program which provides assistance such as meals and clothing, holds services and has a presence on Riker’s Island. The Pastoral Program is a unifier for the community, too, bringing different people together in a peaceful, loving environment. As stated on the Abraham House website, “Most parishes are defined by geography: at Abraham House, incarceration, or the risk of incarceration, defines the parish.”<sup>79</sup>

The **Dutchess Collaborative Reentry Project** (DCRP) is a female orientated organization, which aims to lower recidivism rates among recently incarcerated women in Dutchess County. This DCRP strives to accomplish this by organizing partnerships and efforts between local associations, governmental organizations, and faith and religious based institutions. The DCRP provides resources and information, support, and

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<sup>79</sup> [http://www.abrahamhouse.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=51](http://www.abrahamhouse.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=51) (accessed February 3, 2013).

connections to their clientele, in addition to helping create and maintain communication between Dutchess County and governmental organizations. DCRP receives funding and support from Episcopal Charities, which is part of the Diocese of New York.

**Liberty Ministries** works with those who are currently incarcerated and those who are returning citizens. They have helped thousands of people receive the care and support they need. Liberty Ministries uses the teachings of Jesus Christ as its foundation. Volunteers spend substantial amounts of time in the prisons doing all kinds of service work. There is also a rehabilitation/transitional program through Liberty Ministries which lasts nine months. Participants stay on-site throughout the course of the program.

**Life After Prison Ministries** prepares and teaches churches to help formerly incarcerated men and women transition and rebuild their lives by joining church mentorship and leadership programs

**Forgiveness Project** is a philanthropic, restorative justice organization in the UK that uses true stories from people who have committed crimes and those who have survived them to study the ways in which compassion, forgiveness, and finding peace can be beneficial to human life and happiness. Forgiveness Project utilizes storytelling as the basis for encouraging behavioral transformations and finding forgiveness. Forgiveness Project also runs workshops within various prisons in the United Kingdom, sparking dialogue amongst incarcerated individuals and allowing time to reflect on why they are in prison, what it means, who it affected, and how to move forward

A study was done in 2009 by Caritas Aotearoa in New Zealand, an organization that works with churches and children (both in schools and groups) to raise awareness and educate, on restorative justice and the need for society to reconsider its views on

justice and the penal system. The New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference is in accordance with Caritas, stressing the criticality of forgiveness, redemption, and reconciliation, stating that that is the only true way the “system” will ever change and the only way to put an end to criminal activity. Caritas has a wealth of supplies on the matter, including a pamphlet from Social Justice Week, which is where this study originates, and information and resources for various religious organizations and schools.

In the December 2012 issue, the magazine *Sojourner's* also featured a poignant article on reentry. The article is centered on a group called, **Strength to Love**, named after a sermon by Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. The foundation on which Strength to Love stands is something that Dr. King was adamant about: the power of love. The group, a branch of the Church of Jesus Christ, Right Now, started meeting in 2009 in Washington, D.C. Funding and resources are few, and there is no staff, but what Strength to Love is not lacking in, is hope and heart. A goal of Strength to Love is to try and change the way people see incarceration, eliminating any misconceptions.<sup>80</sup>

Members of Strength to Love see the injustices and hardships that constantly face returning citizens, such as difficulty accessing health care, housing and employment, and aim to change that, and ameliorate the reentry process. Strength to Love draws inspiration from the Bible, citing their calling as one similar to Moses', when he helped liberate the Hebrews from Egypt. Strength for Love recognizes that without a positive environment and a home to return to, returning citizens are more likely to return to their old ways. So, despite their small budget, Strength for Love decided to buy a house in Anacostia, a neighborhood in Washington, D.C. Anacostia is home to over 8,000 formerly

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<sup>80</sup> Good, “A Call to Conversion,” 26-28.

incarcerated individuals. Strength for Love's house will be a home and haven for eight people, but hopefully the rest of the city will take notice and follow suit. Strength for Love is also helping returning citizens find financial stability through an operation called "Life Assets." Strength for Love is more than just a group passionate about changing the judicial system; it also promotes empowerment by and a bottom-up leadership model.

Returning citizens associated with Strength to Love are inclined to help out in any way they can, whether it's reaching out to other men and women who have been in their position, or going with Strength to Love to different conferences and meetings to help promote the program, share stories and seek partnership and assistance. The meeting that the article focuses on is one that representatives from Strength to Love had with the Corrections Corporation of America (CCA). It was one of many meetings they have had, and surely won't be the last. Strength to Love has had multiple unsuccessful attempts at getting support and collaboration from the CCA, but they continue to go back because they are determined to see change occur.

Strength for Love approaches places like the CCA, asking them to work together and find ways that such industries can improve the system instead of exacerbate the problems, including dialogue on ways to lower recidivism, alternative methods of financial growth for prisons, and more, but they don't usually get the answer they are looking for. They keep hoping for dialogue that will bring around change in mindsets, and ultimately change in a flawed system.<sup>81</sup>

In looking at other programs, many of the Christian efforts sent the message "I'm a sinner and need to repent and Jesus will save me." I struggle with this message, whether

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<sup>81</sup> Good, 26-29.



or not believing it to be true. Eric Waters spoke to RCB during Christian Education and said it well: “Believe me if we are in prison we already know we are sinners and don’t need to hear it from you.” He also went on to share that many nice church folks come to share the Gospel as if people on the inside didn’t know about it. He was well versed in scripture. Finally he shared with me a series of sermons that he wrote while he was inside. He was discouraged following a parole denial. He wrote as the preacher and the audience to find the strength and faith to get through it. (See appendix C.)

## CHAPTER 4 RESTORATIVE JUSTICE

### *LISA*

*There are all kinds of ways the people of the church serve as mentors to the men and women of Coming Home. Several mentors are comfortable, and effective, at establishing relationships with the participants, offering comfort and support and good listening and genuine interest. A few mentors specialize in giving help with the kind of practical, day-to-day issues and concerns that get in the way of rehabilitation and renewal.*

*Lisa is that kind of mentor. She describes herself as “not the touchy feely type” and spends time at each meeting giving good, solid financial advice, about setting goals and managing money and avoiding financial traps. She makes sure they all know they can come to her with personal problems and questions.*

*Tom heard her offer, and called to ask for help. Lisa and Tom met so he could spell out his crisis: he just started a new job, and right away, got a notice that his wages would be garnished from a long-ago unpaid student loan. He tried to talk to the loan company, explain his circumstances, he got a song and dance, but no relief.*

*Lisa is the kind of mentor who doesn’t stop with advice. She called the loan company, identified herself as Tom’s representative, and began renegotiating the terms of the loan right then, over the phone. No song and dance this time - the loan company agreed with Lisa on a new set of terms and payments Tom could handle. Tom took on the responsibility of the repayment plan, and gradually the principal was reduced back to the original amount.*

*We heard from Tom on a much more serious note after his classification had been changed completely overturning an already precarious family situation. He was still employed but was in a shelter with strict restrictions, including not being allowed to be near his daughter. The shame he felt was enormous.*

*A dilemma for us was the restrictions at RCB. We had agreed to exclude certain offenses from our program participants in order to get permission for the program to be on the premises. Without hesitation Lisa began to meet Tom at a coffee shop near the shelter before work. She connected him to other helpful resources and was prepared to be supportive on this journey.*

*Mentors bring all kinds of skills, strengths and resources to their involvement with Coming Home. Lisa recognized that Tom needed an advocate this time; she showed great kindness and compassion, an example of Christian attitude and spirit.*

On the night of November 12, 2004 six teenagers in Ronkonkoma, Long Island, bought a 20 pound turkey with a stolen credit card. While driving on Sunrise Highway, 18 year-old Ryan Cushing threw the frozen bird out the back window just for a thrill. The turkey hit Victoria Ruvolo's car, shattering the windshield and breaking many bones in Victoria's face. Victoria chose to forgive the young man.

Fr. Mark Hallinan told this story at a Christian Education class he was giving at RCB about social justice in the Scriptures. Some of the nice usually even-keeled church folks were angered by this tale. They felt that Ryan should be punished and held accountable in prison.

There is a Biblical basis for this urge to punish, and I can understand the desire to punish. But I believe there is an even stronger Biblical basis for restorative justice, for forgiveness, for inclusion and community. Now, as I look back, I can see the growth of our community—transformed by the relationships we've developed during the Coming Home Program. Many of us have witnessed or experienced how forgiveness can soften even the hardest of hearts. I can see a shift on the part of many in the congregation, and myself, people who have been transformed by our experience of CH.

In this chapter I lay out my understanding of Bible-based support for a healing and strengthening approach to dealing with those who have committed a crime against the community.

“Forgiveness is not an occasional act; it is a permanent attitude.”  
Martin Luther King Jr.

I can't really start this chapter without thinking of Sheila. She makes me aware of a long hard journey we are embarking on. I almost didn't accept Sheila into the program because she is so fragile, defensive and angry. She is slowly opening up about her struggle and the thin line she walks of giving into her desire to use drugs and steal as she has done throughout her life. Each week she shares how important it is to her to come to RCB and how it is the only place she ever felt that she is not being judged. We privately celebrated one week when she mentioned the possibility of doing clerical work. This was a cause for celebrating because it was our first glimpse of seeing her show hope or initiative toward a goal. Recently, I received a confidential note from Rita, another participant who is concerned that Sheila is at risk and could easily end up incarcerated again. She has built a protective wall around her, which needed to be built, based on many hurtful experiences that need healing. Now she struggles to find work, get an apartment and create a new life unlike one she has known before. She tells us that she's tired of the prison life. It's easy to see the great challenges she faces and how the protective walls she has built will also keep out opportunity. She wants so much to be free from the oppressive living circumstances she is in, yet she is unequipped to navigate how to do that. She returned from years of incarceration without having an education, or work experience, or mental health services that focus on healing her past trauma. Violet, the RCB mentor, patiently listens, always looking to empower Sheila and point out her strengths, meets with her weekly. Together they talk over dinner and look for jobs. I believe something much greater is going on here.

I find myself learning so much from congregants: Stoddard going to bat for Craig to keep him from being locked up following parole violation; Dan supporting Lou in his business and advocating for him to receive videography jobs; Barbara calling Grace an angel (“though I am secretly worried that Grace is *not* an angel and that I had better protect Barbara—and does she have a mental health issue?”), and then I see the healing power of these efforts. I believe this to be the transforming power of the presence of God. When we stand together, journey together in relationship, it can be transforming.

### **Essential Biblical Themes**

There are frequent and seemingly contradictory examples of what justice might mean in specific circumstances in the Bible. However, there are a few underlying principles that can be gleaned for our understanding of restorative justice.

First, in the Bible there is an inseparable connection of the word ‘justice’ to ‘righteousness.’ The term ‘righteousness’ (*tsedeq* in Hebrew) can be translated as true, honest, right, correct. Justice, then, has to do with the right way of acting which will bring about the state of affairs that God wishes for the community.<sup>82</sup> Justice is intended to bring about a community acting in accordance with the will of God.

Second, the purpose of the Judaic law, (the Mosaic covenant), was to aid in the creation of a community in relationship to God. When the law was broken, the aim was primarily to make things right (restoration), rather than exact punishment, although punishment was imposed. In many cases, the punishment involved making restitution to the injured party. In other cases, it meant purging the evildoer from the community. In

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<sup>82</sup> Donald Kraus, *Sex, Sacrifice, Shame & Smiting: Is the Bible Always Right?* (New York: Seabury Press, 2008), 55.

addition, rituals of atonement were devised to further cleanse the community from sin so it could be made holy once again.<sup>83</sup>

There is a prophetic theme in the Hebrew Scripture, of justice for the poor, the widow, and the foreigner. Throughout the New Testament, Jesus teaches us by his life, radical love, compassion, and inclusiveness; he reaches out to all those who are outcasts and shows that transformation is for each of us. All Scripture needs to be looked at through the lens of these themes: God's love for all people, God's extra concern for the vulnerable, God's blessing the whole world, that people can change, and God changes lives with love for them and forgiveness. People make mistakes and people can change. God still uses the people who have made mistakes. God pursues people with unstoppable love and forgiveness. God does not give up on people. Our current criminal justice system is brimming with the most vulnerable people and seems to give up on people. Instead of working toward change and transformation, we punish. We disproportionately punish people who are African-American and low income. Yet we know that change can happen.

"When you have loved your neighbor you have loved God" (Mt 25), the greatest commandment. How could this not be extended to the modern day person who is incarcerated? This is a call for each of us. Jesus picked fisherman and tradespeople. He was bypassing the religious establishment of the day. God uses people, all people, and can change and transform lives.

Third, there is a future *emphasis in the application of biblical justice*, calling forth the people to *receive the blessings of God, rather than focusing on immediate*

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<sup>83</sup> Jim Consedine, "Restorative Justice—Creative Peacemaking," *Peterpullar.com*, 149, [http://peterpullar.com/overcomming\\_violence.htm](http://peterpullar.com/overcomming_violence.htm) (accessed January 30, 2013).

*punishment*. God is the just one, and God's people are called to live out a vision of holiness and right relationship known as *shalom*

The word revenge was never used in the original Biblical texts. The meaning of the word changed from something peaceful in Hebrew to something vengeful in English and other translations (with few exceptions). So, the notion that “retaliation” is acceptable because it is written in the Bible is unfounded and untrue. Furthermore, the Bible actually promotes reconciliation and solutions to conflict through peaceful talk and just actions. The laws taught in the Bible, using the Ten Commandments as an example, aren't meant to invoke fear of punishment or dictate how one acts, but are guidelines for a life in which, if followed, one will not commit crime. The justice system in the United States, if it were following the footsteps of the Bible, would focus on peace and finding both a just solution to a problem, but also fixing the root cause. Instead, the justice system encourages a negative cycle of crime.<sup>84</sup>

According to Wayne Northey and Pierre Allard, the Bible actually encourages and suggests restorative justice as a means to resolving criminal issues and working with those who committed them. They base this on the idea that God is love—everything God does is in the name of love, and God, already knowing our sins, can forgive us. If God is the embodiment of love and forgiveness, then those are the ideologies that should be used in the face of crime and misconduct. As mentioned earlier, the word “shalom” is crucial to the presence of restorative justice in the Bible, according to Northey and Allard's argument, but they also explain that the church, historically, has strayed from this concept of peace and justice, going all the way back to.

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<sup>84</sup> H. Bianchi, *Biblical Vision of Justice* (Akron, PA: Mennonite Central Committee, 1984), 1-9.

They discuss various elements that contributed to this deviation, including the following: the establishment of Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire under the Emperor Constantine; and the development of the satisfaction theory of the atonement by Anselm, which significantly influenced theology, social thought, and popular piety. While there have been exceptions, the Church often became an apologist for and even an agent of violent, retributive responses to crime. The authors then observe that in the last generation there have been a number of initiatives from many sources promoting restorative responses to crime. Citing specific initiatives among Christians, they express hope that the Christian Church, in its engagement with criminal justice issues and practices, is beginning to reclaim its spiritual and theological foundations in God's restoration and reconciliation in Jesus.<sup>85</sup>

Fourth, there is a *strong communal dimension to biblical justice*. Many times the whole community would be punished for the sin of one person as in the case of Achan (Joshua 7). The whole community would be expected to not only witness the punishments but execute them as well. Thus, unlike today where people are hired for the purpose and executions are done in private, the recognition of how individuals were bound to each other and an individual's behavior rebounded on the community was evident to all. The communal dimension can also be seen in such statements where it is said that the children would bear the sins of their parents to the 3rd and 4th generation (Ex 20:5, Ex 34:7, Dt 5:9-10).<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Pierre Allard and Wayne Northey, "Christianity: The rediscovery of restorative justice," in *The Spiritual Roots of Restorative Justice*, edited by Michael L. Hadley, 119-141 (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001).

<sup>86</sup> Kraus, 65.



One of the greatest revelations I have had during this Coming Home prison ministry is the power of a non-judgmental supportive community. Within the CH community there exists a belief in participants to grow and make important contributions to the community and their families. Our original intention for the CH program was to focus on skills sessions, goal setting and mentoring through the congregants and resources within the community. It is clear to me that there is great healing power in this community itself, before any of the classes are introduced. Participants of the group talk about coming to RCB each week, many through great struggles navigating public transportation, and hoops to jump through with parole officers and curfews. I am told again and again that it is the one place they do not feel judged; they feel accepted, and warmly welcomed. When they don't feel like attending they know their absence will not go unnoticed and they will be missed. The participants of the CH program have experienced punishment and are returning to society feeling like outcasts, struggling and hurting. It's their experience of being accepted, respected and believed in that supports their transformation. We are overdue to rethink what needs to happen when we wrong or hurt one another, as well as what we consider to be a crime. To do this through the lens of our faith is a great place to start, but at this point an economic lens or a logical lens could serve just as well, because what we are doing is not working. Money that is being spent on our unhealthy destructive criminal justice system could be used better to educate, heal, or in some other way nurture the sacred dignity of human life. A faith community is a great place to ask the courageous questions and challenge a status quo which is failing to help, and actually harming individuals, families and communities as a whole. Wouldn't it

be better to help each person see the strengths, gifts, possibilities and presence of God within themselves?

Fifth, the positive side of this communal dimension can be seen in the emphasis on economic justice. Economic justice was built into the covenant laws through such regulations which allowed the poor to glean from the edges of the fields (Dt 24:17, 19, 22) and required the Israelites to treat foreigners as citizens (Lev 19:33-34). Economic justice can also be seen in the regulations regarding the Sabbatical Year and the Jubilee Year (Lev 25). These laws were designed to keep balance in the economic system to ensure that the rich would not simply continue to get richer and the poor poorer. Every seven years, debt would have to be forgiven. Indentured servants in one's household who were there because of debt would be set free with the means to begin a new life. Even the land would be given rest (Lev). In the Jubilee Year which occurred every 50 years, ancestral land that had been lost due to debt would have to be returned to its original owners. Although there is no historical evidence that the Jubilee Year was carried out, its presence in the Mosaic Law reveals the vision of what this covenant community valued as justice. There is an attempt to organize society in such a way that an underclass will not be permanent and people will always have a second chance. This concern for those marginalized in society is a theme that runs throughout the Hebrew Scriptures and into the Christian Scriptures. There are countless examples: the Rich Young Man, Mk 10; Zacchaeus Lk 19; the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Lk 16; the letter of James 1:26-2:7).<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Kraus, 70-71.

While I am not making an argument to return to the Bible's way of executing justice, I believe that the above principles can serve as both a guideline and critique for our criminal justice system. Clearly we do not want to return to the death penalty for cursing a parent or breaking the Sabbath. But the communal and restorative emphasis is something we can learn from.

Restorative Justice has been defined in many ways. I'll use Howard Zehr's definition: "Restorative justice requires at a minimum, that we address victims harms and needs, hold offenders accountable to put right those harms, and involve victims, offenders, and communities in this process"<sup>88</sup> I've compiled this chart to identify some additional Biblical support for a philosophy of restorative justice and healing for the individual and the community.

### **Biblical underpinnings for Restorative Justice**

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Transformation</b>
Genesis 1:26-	God created man and woman in the divine image looked at was created and found it very good. There is innate worth of every individual.
Ex 2:11	Moses is someone who committed murder yet he is chosen to lead the Jewish people. We are all called to do Gods work in the world.
Luke 23:33-43	At the crucifixion Jesus still showed forgiveness and understanding to those condemning Him. Jesus asked God to forgive them "For they don't know what they are doing." Then Jesus is acknowledged and understood by the thief on the cross next to him, and lets us know that because his neighbor saw the Divine in Him, he will be in heaven. We are all called to forgiveness and also to seek the Divine nature in each of us. "Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise"
Luke 15:11-32	The Prodigal son wastes his inheritance but repents and his father forgives him and celebrates.
John 8:7-11	When a woman is caught in act of adultery, Jesus says, " <i>Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone</i> "

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<sup>88</sup> Howard Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice* (Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2002), 25.

Scripture	Transformation
	<i>at her.</i> God is teaching us that we all sin and are way more than our sin, we are not to condemn.
Galatians 6:10	<i>“so then, whenever we have opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially those of the family of faith.”</i> Do good within the community.
Luke 5:29-32; Matthew 9:10-13	Jesus hung out with tax collectors and sinners.
Exodus 23:10-11	Every seven years land was to lie fallow to replenish- and give to the poor.
Exodus 21:2-6	slaves were to be released after they had served seven years.
Deut. 15:1-2	<i>“At the end of every seventh year you are to cancel the debts of those who owe you money ... the Lord himself has declared the debt canceled.”</i> we have a “year of remission” in which all people burdened with debts will be released.
Neh. 5:1-13	A good model for modern debt cancellation. Following the Babylonian exile, Nehemiah, a Jew appointed to rebuild Jerusalem, is appalled to discover that some of his fellow Israelites have become impoverished and enslaved by usurious lending practices of other wealthy Israelites. He called together all parties, rich and poor, for a meeting and demanded an end to the practice. “Let us stop this taking of interest,” he said to the wealthy lenders. Chagrined, they agreed and said they would “restore everything and demand nothing more from them.”
Amos 2:6-7	<i>“The Lord says, ‘The people of Israel have sinned ... They sell into slavery honest people who cannot pay their debts, the poor who cannot repay even the price of a pair of sandals’”</i>
Luke 7: 41-42	<i>“A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them.”</i>
Hab. 2: 6-7	<i>How long will you go on getting rich by forcing your debtors to pay up?’ But before you know it, you that have conquered others will be in debt yourselves and forced to pay interest.”</i>
Matthew 18:21-35	The parable of the unforgiving servant. This passage addresses forgiveness, including forgiving debts. Jesus tells a parable about a King who forgives an incalculable debt owed by a slave, showing when we feel forgiveness; we should be able to forgive. Yet, the first slave saw his dealings with the king as business and

<b>Scripture</b>	<b>Transformation</b>
	continued to live as though he had not been forgiven.
James 2:14-26.	There is relationship of faith and works. When acting out our faith, change follows. Mercy includes forgiveness for those who wrong us.
1Corinthians 12:12	As a global community, we resemble one body with many parts. When one part suffers, all parts suffer with it. Undoubtedly the family and community suffers when a person is incarcerated.
(Luke 4:16-30)	At the beginning of his Galilean ministry, Jesus chooses to read the prophet Isaiah's passage where it is written, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring glad tidings to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, and freedom for the oppressed and to proclaim a year acceptable to the Lord" and this is fulfilled in folks' hearing
Acts 2:43-46, 4:32-37	Disciples sell property and fields, share wealth, break bread together, rest and study and restore community
Luke 10:29-37	The story of the Good Samaritan who did all he could to help a victim of crime, a stranger, that others including priests passed by, is a model of compassion and action for us today. We must be willing to stop and help victims of crime recover from their physical and emotional wounds
Ezekiel 37	God promises to restore the Israelites to what they had lost. God promises to renew God's covenant with them and to once again claim as God's own
Romans 3:23	"all have sinned and come short of the glory of God"

While I was writing this section of the paper, I received a phone call at home about an incident regarding a church program under my direction, an offshoot of our Coming Home program: the Systemic Change project in Yonkers named "Opening Doors," inspired by Alfonso Wyatt's sermon on Empowerment Sunday.

The incident involved Dontae being attacked, a physical fight breaking out between an intoxicated man and youth worker, Dontae, in front of all the children at an after-school program at Good Shepherd Church. The incident escalated later when Dontae was leaving the building and the intoxicated man approached him with a knife.

Dontae defended himself with a stick. Both were wounded. The man is in the hospital with a concussion and Dontae has many scrapes, bumps and bruises. Police are investigating.

Because I was immersed in the reading of restorative justice, I believe my response was different than it would have been in the past. Immediately we begin talking about what is best for the community and how as a team we can heal the situation and go forward working together. Pastor Ezequiel at Good Shepherd has already attempted to reach out to the man in the hospital to offer support and perhaps gain understanding of why the man is drunk and angry at the church after-school program. Ezequiel wants to show that we will respond a different way than “revenge” or cutting this man out of community. Perhaps there’s a small chance that this unfortunate incident can be used to build relationships and move us forward in community.

Throughout scripture Jesus is accepting people as they are and knowing they are more than their sin. There are powerful examples of acceptance of people whose lives transgressed law. This version of “Biblical restorative justice” can be a model for our criminal justice system and our caring for the whole community. For example: The model of Israel’s Babylonian exile and its subsequent restoration is a model in the Old Testament of the justice one would expect by human standards and the restorative justice by which God acts. The Israelites seemed to understand that the collapse of their nation before the onslaught of the Babylonians and their subsequent exile and slavery were the result of their own corruption. They accepted responsibility for the ‘punishment’ that befell them. Then they recognized that their restoration to the land they had lost was the gracious and gratuitous act of God. In the prophecy of Ezekiel Chapter 7, you have the

judgment of God against the people for their abominations and the punishment that will be inflicted upon them. But then in Chapter 37 you have God promising to restore the Israelites to what they had lost. God promises to renew God's covenant with them and to once again claim as God's own.

Jesus focused on people in need, rather than dogma. Our contemporary faith should prioritize people and community above the law. Jesus teaches us that more important than following the 'institution' or the conventions and laws of the church is to reach out to one another—especially those in need of healing—with love and acceptance.

I believe Christians today ought to be outraged at the injustices of our current system and be moved to act. In particular, we are incarcerating entire segments of our society. In Michelle Alexander's book, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, she demonstrates how our current social systems create a new racial caste system and that our legal system unfairly targets people of color, especially poor black men in urban ghettos. This creates an underclass of former and future felons. How do we create "jubilee" here?

When we exclude, the opportunity to dialogue and grow an understanding of others' viewpoints and experience is lost, further establishing a wall of 'us' versus 'them.' Our ability to learn, grow and journey together benefiting from each other's God-given gifts is lost. Separation from one another is a broad step away from the love that Christ teaches us. People are moved to compassion when they understand someone's situation.

I believe we can look to the Bible for powerful evidence of the principle that "God equals justice." The natural harmony God intended to exist in society has been

rupted by sin—affecting relations between men and women, human beings and nature, human beings and work. Sin is not only an individual reality but a social reality as well. The mass incarceration that Michelle Alexander writes about is a social sin. Liberation is an act of God that uses human instruments that, in turn, use the position they have in society to effect change for those without a voice or influence. I believe at RCB this is our responsibility because of the position we have in society, and use our voice of influence and social capital to work for justice.

Justice—*sedeq*—is a dynamic conception of God’s positive action in creating and sustaining community, particularly on behalf of the poor. It refers, as well, to the situation resulting when such justice is present: peace, salvation, faithfulness, kindness and compassion. The Bible has great concern for the ‘poor’; poverty itself is an evil. The ‘poor’ in the Bible are without exception powerless people who experience economic and social deprivation. I believe this speaks directly to a significant majority of the prison population.

Key themes in the New Testament from the life and ministry of Jesus include summoning the people to a renewed dedication to the primacy of God in their lives and to a deepened concern for their neighbor. The love to which we are called by Jesus calls us to reject the divisions we create within the human family, to love God, love neighbor, love enemies, be merciful. (Lk.10:25-28; Mt.5:38-48; Lk.6:27-38; Lk.10:29-37)

Just as the Good Samaritan moved *toward* the injured man, we must move toward people in order to love, in order to build relationships. This is at the heart of compassion. It doesn’t just happen. It isn’t convenient. The Samaritan is moving toward someone who would despise him, if he were conscious. Someone who would not do the same if the



situation was reversed. There is so much power in relationship. Relationship is the power of the Coming Home program. People are changed and moved by relationship. It is mutually liberating. In this dialogue, we recognize that we are the same; we all are flawed and at the same time we all embody God. Jesus is about power IN relationship as opposed to power 'over' another. Jesus's passion was love and justice. His passion led to His Passion. He was in a system of power and might (Rome and Judaism) which cost Him His life. The covenant relationship with God reveals God's desire for people to live in a community offering faithful worship to God and care for their neighbor.

We are learning about the transformational power of relationships through our Coming Home program at RCB. The trauma scores of participants are decreased by the end of the 18 weeks. We learned that there are fewer hospitalizations if someone receives a phone call once a month. We are experiencing things on a weekly basis that we are learning from.

I'm learning how fear creates terrible consequences for all of us. Craig, seething with anger from a domestic dispute, agreed to meet me at RCB. Regina repeatedly called and texted while Craig was trying to explain the situation to me. Each communication caused Craig to erupt with agitation. I wrapped my head around this complicated situation: Craig's car was registered in Regina's name since he was unable to procure a car loan on his own. Regina reported the car as stolen as a good lesson for Craig who would not come to her home as she was requesting. In a desperate attempt to manage the urgent situation I called my dear friend Frank for advice. Formerly youth minister and colleague, Frank now worked at NYPD and I knew he would have a sound suggestion; perhaps bring the car to the police department and explain the situation? Or call the

police and Regina and let them know the car is at the church? How do we protect Craig in such a volatile situation? Frank's response to the situation and his alarmed response to me seemed out of character. "This is one of the bad guys you are with! He is a bad guy! I need you to get out of there now!!!"

At RCB we are learning that there are no "bad guys". We are all good and bad. We are in a set of circumstances with or without skills and supports to manage them. Craig and Regina have a history together and feelings for each other with little coping skills to manage and navigate the difficult circumstances they face. How do we help families repair in the context of such a pressure cooker for a container? How do we help the broader community to understand we are part of creating these circumstances? How do we create something new?

What we are up against is the fact that prison has become big business in our country. Greed and profit are honored rather than the human life. We are essentially warehousing poor black men. People of color are incarcerated at a higher rate than others. Racism is an evil at work. Yet every time we say the Lord's Prayer we are asking for forgiveness of selves, others and God (Mt.6:9-15). And what about the teachings from Jesus's Sermon on the Mount (Mt.5:1-12) and the Sermon on the Plain (Lk.6:17, 20-23)? We have systemic injustice at work and faith is the only thing that provides me with hope.

[T]he political opposition to restorative justice (RJ) is formidable: the phalanx of lawyers and judges who may lose status and jobs if RJ replaces large areas of their traditional responsibilities; unions of prison employees(whose numbers exceed 2.3 million prisoners in the US); business corporations who are beginning to succeed in getting contracts for managing prisons for profit and who persuade government to guarantee certain levels of prisoner occupancy; perpetual media attention

to dramas of violent crime; and most of all the continued tilt of legislators and public opinion toward the myths of punitive justice.<sup>89</sup>

In Eric Waters' paper, "Samson Unshackled" (see appendix C) he uses the exodus as a metaphor for the coming out of Egypt to worship the Lord, as prisoners should come out of prison to worship the Lord (after stopping in to see their parole officer). He compares the Egyptians, Slave-owners and the prison Industrial Complex as all having a good thing and not wanting to give up the benefits of slave labor.

While approaching the issues from different theological and philosophical traditions, authors agree on the problems with contemporary criminal justice: institutional forces benefit from a destructive status quo; the public view of prisoners makes citizens indifferent to their plight; and an emphasis on individual responsibility fails to take seriously the systemic injustice that prisoners face. The solutions: remember that prisoners, too, are made in the image of God; address the systemic causes of crime; and learn to love the people touched by crime.<sup>90</sup>

Christ freely challenged the social order of his day. Aren't we called to do something? Jesus's passion was love and justice. His passion led to His passion. He was in a system of power and might (Rome and Judaism) which cost Him His life.

I'm writing as gun debates ensue following the tragic shootings at Newtown and faith communities are called to be part of this discussion. In Geoffrey Canada's book *Fist Stick Knife Gun* there is a horrifying chapter about the gun industry's deliberate decision to target youth and women in order to increase gun sales in a white male saturated market. They began to market toward women with pink guns that fit into your purse and cool looking guns with names like "Viper" for youth.<sup>91</sup> This happened to coincide with

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<sup>89</sup> Donald W. Shriver, Jr. and Peggy L. Shriver, "Law, Religion and Restorative Justice in New Zealand," *Journal of Law and Religion* 27 (December 2012): 101-135.

<sup>90</sup> L. Lynette Parker, "Christian Critiques of the Penal System," *Christian Reflection* (February 2012): 85.

<sup>91</sup> Geoffrey Canada, *Fist Stick Knife Gun* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 125.

the moment that drug dealers were using kids to run drugs to avoid the consequences of the Rockefeller Drug laws and the introduction of crack cocaine which became a booming business. Soon many young people were armed and of course the consequences of that were terrible. It's heartbreaking to me that we live in a society where youth (whose brain development is still maturing) are held accountable with long ineffective prison sentences while those who were around the board room making the decision to market guns to the youth walk free from any responsibility.

Our culture is not looking at these issues from a faith perspective and instead has become a punishing culture honoring "tough on crime" sentences. We need to look at the structures and systems in place that perpetuate this unjust system. "The head of youth courts for the New Zealand government, Andrew Becroft, points to recent research in adolescent brain development that confirms the suspicion that humans develop the capacity for mature decision making at about age 20. Becroft looks at the number of adolescents in US prisons and comments "The United States has the best research in the world on adolescent psychology, and the worst response to its implications for dealing with youth crime."<sup>92</sup>

For more than a quarter of a century, psychologist Robert D. Enright has been a pioneer in the scientific study of forgiveness—*Time* magazine described him as 'the forgiveness trailblazer.' Enright supported his findings with empirical data alone, insisting that his method is usable by everyone, not just religious folks.

Today, many "experts" specialize in forgiveness studies.

Enright taught a seminar on forgiveness at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, where he was a tenured professor. Among the assigned readings for the seminar were selections from the scriptures of various religious

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<sup>92</sup> Shriver, "Law, Religion and Restorative Justice," 121.

traditions. 'People start forgiving others and they say, 'Hey this is good stuff, it sets me free and helps my relationships. What's the next step?'

In a 'pragmatic, show-me-what-works age,' forgiveness has powerful evangelical appeal, Enright said. 'But this goes way beyond relaxation. It's surgery for the heart.'<sup>93</sup>

Forgiveness is in the mainstream across disciplines. Forgiveness is the subject of many retreats, books, therapy sessions, research studies, scholarly endeavors and is even on the Oprah Winfrey show.

The whole nation watched after a planned attack, shooting nine and killing five children at a one room schoolhouse in an Amish community. Almost immediately the Amish community members were speaking about forgiveness and embraced the wife and three children of Charles Roberts—a distraught grieving father who was responsible. Within the community they recognized the Roberts family had grief too. They did this together as a community. It appeared that the Amish handled this tragedy with dignity, forgiveness and strength.

As a social worker my first thought is that I hope the feelings of anger and grief are able to be expressed and worked through in a way that leads to healthy forgiveness and not denial and repression which is not loving toward the self. However if it were me in those circumstances, I would want to be in supportive community to help me take the higher ground. It is easy to fall into the trap of responding with revenge. When I worked at St. Edward Catholic Church a bunch of us in social ministry received a grant to get mediation training at Hofstra Law School. We clearly saw what was happening as couples struggled, decided to divorce, and would find themselves in a battle which

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<sup>93</sup> Francis X. Rocca, "Forgiveness Expert Explores Religious Dimension," *The Christian Century*, March 22, 2011, <http://www.christiancentury.org/article/2011-02/forgiveness-scholar-opens-role-faith> (accessed February 6, 2013).

created more and more damage. It wasn't uncommon that a woman would arrive at our food pantry driving a Mercedes Benz or Jaguar but with no money for food. Accustomed to a high income but all funds diverted to legal counsel as the hurts were dredged up and fuel was added to an already painful fire. If only family/friends/ supportive community spoke about forgiveness—what a very different future there would be for everyone involved, especially children who are spending their formative years in these painful environments while legal battles carry on.

As I write this paper, I receive lots of support from my ex-husband and his new family who are currently sharing our home as they are in transition. This could have been a very different situation if we didn't sow seeds of love and compassion through a painful divorce process. It could have had a very different ending, but instead we are surrounding each other with love and support. For this I have gratitude of Biblical proportions!

At Rye Presbyterian Church on "Church and Justice Sunday," the formerly incarcerated preacher spoke about being in court where an accused murderer sat stone-faced through a barrage of grieving family members who berated him and shared their hopes for him to burn in hell, etc. Finally when a mother spoke of her grief and said she forgave him, he showed emotion and began to cry. Forgiveness touches the deepest part of us.

**Some other models of transformative justice:**

1. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was powerful step after apartheid in South Africa.
2. Rwanda has moved forward tremendously following genocide and has worked on mending relationships between Hutus and Tutsis.

At one of our Coming Home graduation ceremonies—after Anna spoke—I received feedback that some audience members were disturbed because she showed no remorse. Stoddard said she did what any mama bear would do to protect her cub. These discussions need to continue before we walk away from the table with feelings of judgment.

At RCB we have the opportunity to create a restorative justice model of community. We still don't really know what we're doing. Incarceration is a huge problem with complex issues of poverty, racism, addiction, and more. We don't know the territory we are in, and chances are we are going to make mistakes. Perhaps we can ask for pre-emptory forgiveness

Can we offer each other grace and forgiveness from the beginning? It's not that we won't hold each other accountable and learn best practices, but can we have a platform of forgiveness to start with?

This attitude will help us to act and set into motion a small step to begin to educate ourselves and build relationships. The situation is urgent and yet often churches are at risk of studying issues for extended periods of time without ever taking action, as a former colleague of mine always referred to his Presbyterian denomination as "The Frozen Chosen".

Sometimes we have to do our best and find our path by walking it—collaboration as community working together. Let's hold each other accountable and ask for forgiveness.

How do we create a culture of forgiveness starting inward with ourselves; extending to our own church and community; and to finally extending from the outside

world to the prison system? What's the difference between accountability vs. blame, compassion vs. pity, judgment vs. judgmental? We need to ask ourselves, "are we delving deeper into the heart of God?"

Another part of the transformation and creating a community of healing begins with the healing, compassion, forgiveness of self. This is done as a parallel process in the CH. We don't highlight it or talk about it much. Ego strengthening, meditation, prayer, poetry throughout the reflections are all designed to heal, and teach self-love. There are quotes hung around the room "The good news is, God loves you exactly as you are." "What will you do with the rest of your one precious life?" "The world needs more people doing what they love in the world."

The Mayo Clinic website talks about forgiveness as important for a person's health, for example, forgiveness lowers blood pressure.<sup>94</sup> It cites the work of Dr. Everett Worthington, a psychologist who has researched forgiveness for decades and has developed a five step process called REACH. R(recall) E (empathize) A (Altruistic gift of forgiveness) C(Committing yourself to forgive publicly) H (holding onto forgiveness). Research shows that physical illness is connected to trauma and those who hold onto anger maybe this is part of the miraculous web of life that God created for us.<sup>95</sup>

Donald Shriver speaks to the current debate as to whether there is enough evidence yet to organize for Restorative Justice (RJ). I understand in the current reality of our world, it is evidence based practices that are held up as models can be used to move us toward change, but I really don't understand how faith communities can ignore this.

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<sup>94</sup> <http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/forgiveness/MH00131> (accessed February 6, 2013).

<sup>95</sup> <http://www.dts.edu/media/play/helping-people-reach-forgiveness-worthington-everett> (accessed February 6, 2013).



Shriver speaks throughout his article of “doing something, even if imperfect, is mandatory.”<sup>96</sup>

Luke’s Gospel in particular shows Jesus as a model to follow who is concerned and caring for the poor, lowly, outcast, the sinner, and afflicted and those who recognize their dependence on God (Luke 4, 18; 6,20-23;7,36-50;14,12-14;15,1-32;16,19-31;18,9-14;19, 1-10; 21, 1-4) and is severe to those who put wealth and material things before serving God and (6, 24-26; 12, 13-21; 16, 13-15. 19-31; 18, 9-14. 15-25. Luke is very concerned with the mercy and compassion of Jesus (7, 41-43; 10, 29-37; 13, 6-9; 15, 11-32)

RCB is removed from the neighborhoods, the racism, poverty, trauma and mass incarceration yet the generosity of many of its people has been extraordinary. This is such a hopeful witness. Pharaoh didn’t listen to Moses until the 10th plague when his son died. It’s usually when we are personally affected that things change for us.

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<sup>96</sup> Shriver, “Law, Religion and Restorative Justice,” 101.

## CHAPTER 5 COMING HOME AT RCB

### HOW WE ARRIVED AT RCB'S FIRST COMING HOME PROGRAM GRADUATION (A LITTLE RHYME I WROTE AND READ TO OUR GRADUATES AND GUESTS):

*I'd like to share a little rhyme  
At Coming Home graduation time  
For those who think I'm not a poet  
Believe me I already know it  
But I am so inspired you see  
I can be whoever I'd like to be*

*For 18 weeks on Thursday night  
I gather with men of extraordinary might  
They are so committed to growth and change  
Taking charge of what they can rearrange  
I believe in their success  
So much I had to acquiesce  
To the fact that I can reinvent myself too  
Each one of us can start anew*

*We're learning and growing in this community  
See how we flourish with our unity  
It's a special moment in time  
For Coming Home is in its prime*

*Let me tell you how it started  
It's when the mission council imparted  
"We must live our faith, we must do more  
There's a Gospel mandate that we can't ignore  
Jesus loved the prisoner, clearly  
We must do the same if we love God dearly"  
Bill Hertlein was champion mission chair  
So focused on mission, you'd better beware  
Then came Ken Ruge our new Pastor  
And things began to happen much faster  
His wife Susan Harris, also a minister  
Deeply committed to stopping the sinister*

*Knew Bruce MacCloud and Hudson Link  
Sean Pica said yes, without even a blink  
Let's work together for reintegration  
Marc Greenberg was eager for the collaboration  
Using his innovative life skills model  
With John Conyers on board, we were full throttle*

*What happened next was beyond expectations  
It was the beginning of powerful relations  
With 8 extraordinary, super special men,  
Three more were added, one left, now there's 10*

*Mike, Thomas, Craig and Will  
Stand strong and sturdy as they climb uphill  
I listen, learn, laugh and cry  
They make me really want to try  
To make the world a better place  
A place of peace, forgiveness grace  
There's Derek, Evan, Tom  
Innovative, bright, faithful, the list goes on  
Chris and Gregory way more than a few good men <sup>97</sup>  
And our sturdy leader Johnny, that makes ten*

*High quality, gifted, hardworking guys  
With such grit and attitude, it opened our eyes  
How could anyone not be moved and supportive  
When faced with the gifts that these men have to give  
So it became clear from day one  
That Bronxville committed to make Coming Home run*

*Creating a safe homey place each week  
With love and with care and with good food to eat  
The welcome committee was led by Gay  
Sherrie organized the meals in her most gracious way  
With love and generosity volunteers appeared  
Rooting for success and healing, these men were endeared*

*Computers, finances, many other classes  
Some listening, some networking, some organizing the masses  
It is clear support services must be arranged  
And we need to work, for systemic change*

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<sup>97</sup> "A Few Good Men" refers to the guys in the program who formed a band that then played at RCB graduation with the church folks filling in for band members still in Sing Sing: additions of my husband Glen on guitar and vocals, Tom Rodman, Director of Deutsche Bank on drums.

*Patsy, David, Louanne and the mentors  
Working from their very centers  
Tom Rodman, co-founder of Strive  
With his attitude boot camp to help us survive  
All committed for the very long haul  
To a journey that benefits one and all*

*For me I've been watching this Gospel in action  
I'm grateful to be part of this powerful faction  
Things are not perfect, we don't have all the answers  
All the jobs, or forgiving fair world enhancers  
But I do believe that something big  
And beautiful is happening in this gig*

*These 18 weeks of committed hard work  
Will create a long lasting perk  
Not just for us, but many others  
A ripple to benefit our sisters and brothers  
So volunteers, graduates, stand proud today  
Although a difficult journey is still at bay  
It's time to stop and celebrate  
The successes we have made to date  
Be grateful for our program friends  
Though it's graduation, it never ends*

*One more thought for whatever its worth  
I see a glimpse of building God's Kingdom on earth*

*Coming Home Graduation Rhyme by Dawn Ravella (aka Dawn's rap), Dec 17, 2009*

## **Preparing RCB for the Coming Home Program**

Our goal was to pro-actively present the program to the congregation/community; communicating all aspects of the program, reaching as many people in the surrounding communities as possible. Our theme was how hard the participants have worked to graduate college (Hudson Link was the first group); they have earned a second chance; and it is our Christian responsibility to help them.

Planning, communications and activities from and about the Coming Home program stretched from May through December of 2009. In May and June, we carried out a complete program overview and developed a set of “FAQs”—frequently asked

questions we knew we would have to address. We updated the members of the Consistory, posted materials on the church website, and sent program information to the congregation.

- We conducted adult education classes including topics about what the Scriptures say about “the Prisoner,” social justice in the Scriptures, forgiveness and redemption, and had many formerly incarcerated presenters leading classes. We then opened the process to sign-up. In June, we did all this to ready ourselves for a program “launch” in September. We recognized that July and August would be unproductive months for the congregation, because of travel and vacation schedules.
- In September 2010 we again provided an update to Consistory members, encouraged additional sign-up, and began to publicize the presentation of “The Castle,” a play written by four formerly incarcerated New Yorkers, conceived and directed by David Rothenberg of The Fortune Society. That same month, we began adult education classes, a series that ran from September through November. In November, we began to publicize and promote Speakers Night, and signaled the plans for a Community Night in January of 2011. The articles, updates and online announcements continued through the month of December.
- Over the course of the program, we released more than 20 messages in print, and on the internet, about Coming Home events and activities. We carried out three direct-mail campaigns to congregants.
- We presented the films such as *Hard Road Home* and *Zero Percent* followed by panel discussions. Graduations were particularly powerful for congregants and participants and I received a lot of positive feedback indicating growth through learning and supportive community.

## **Introduction to the Program**

Coming Home is an eighteen-session program for returning citizens based on the Life Skills Empowerment Program (LSEP) which was developed jointly by Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing and New York Catholic Charities. Coming Home assists individuals in the process of recovery from trauma associated with major life crises. Through the strengthening of essential life skills and the sharing of life stories within the context of supportive community, this program truly helps rebuild lives. Typically LSEP classes have between eight and twelve participants. The CH sessions are composed of four distinct components: Life Skills Sessions with Guest Speakers, Goal Setting with Congregants, Personal Stories, plus two special sessions—Graduation and a Public Policy Forum.

### **Program components**

1. **Life Skills Sessions with Guest Speakers** - Speakers offer presentations on important topics including Self Image, Goal Setting, Healthy Relationships, and The World of Work.
2. **Goal Setting with Congregants** - Each participant works one-on-one with a trained volunteer to set and achieve short- and long-term goals.
3. **Personal Stories** - Participants are guided in sharing their experiences. At the end of the program they are invited to share their story at graduation, if they choose.
4. **Two Special sessions** - A **Graduation** where participants, congregants, friends and family celebrate the successful completion of the program. And a **Public Policy Forum** where participants, mentors and other community members meet with public officials to discuss public policies that pertain to the New York State penal system and how they could be improved.

Each session begins with a shared meal and shared reflection on a passage from scripture or an inspirational reading. All religions and philosophies are welcome.

## **Preparation for Key Components of the Program**

The Coming Home prison ministry was designed as a life skills empowerment process where returning citizens are given the opportunity to set goals with the support of a mentor, share their story within a supportive environment, learn skills, have access to the social capital of church folks, and be empowered to enter the political process to work for systemic change. It was our intention that Coming Home be carried out in the context of a larger process to educate the whole community and move us all forward on an interactive *service and learning* journey; therefore, it would involve congregants, participants and others in a variety of engaging and rewarding activities. We chose to model it after the Life Skills Empowerment Program (LSEP) which, since its inception in 1989 had been used to establish similar programs for the homeless in Manhattan, Bronx and Queens. Recognition that many homeless had incarceration in their history made the adaptation of the program to serve the prison population seem like a natural next-step. Many changes were made to the original template—both before and during the program—including considerations of a congregation who would not likely commit to more than one evening each week, for example.

It was clear to me from the start that we would need to collaborate with a partner like Hudson Link. That program has more experience dealing with our intended program participants. With their guidance and support we described and connected with our ideal candidates.

### **Participant profile:**

- must have a history of incarceration
- clean from drug or alcohol abuse for at least 3 months

- committed to setting goals
- interested in learning and sharing about themselves
- interested in connecting with a supportive group in a positive surrounding
- Must be punctual.

We had to establish several resources before we could begin the CH initiative:

Funding for participant stipend and transportation	A program schedule and syllabus
Volunteer staffing for classes, skills workshops and mentors	A caseworker ( <i>I used student interns from Fordham which requires a supervisor with an MSW and a SIFI [Student Intern Field Instructor] Certification to become a field instructor</i> )
A meeting space	Stipends, train tickets, Metrocards
Training for mentors	
Volunteer chefs to prepare meals	A site for the special sessions

## Background

Coming Home is one of seventeen programs offered by The Reformed Church of Bronxville. It was initiated by the RCB Mission Council under my direction in collaboration with Marc Greenberg of Interfaith Assembly and Sean Pica of Hudson Link. The first cycle served only men from Hudson Link; the next two cycles served men and women returning to the community from prison. The current cycle is serving women who have been incarcerated and have a history of violence. The programs follow the LSEP model and have borrowed many of the practices, documents and curriculum from the LSEP program at St. Xavier's. In this cycle RCB has taken on the coordination and development of the program working closely with Fordham School of Social Services,



and has adapted the curriculum to meet the needs of the women in the program. IAHH and Hudson Link no longer have a direct role.

### **Participants**

This cycle is serving six women who have been incarcerated and have experienced violence although we aim for 10 participants. This program is organized in collaboration with Tina Reynolds, the Executive Director of WORTH, which serves women returning from prison. Tina referred the women and conducted the initial training of the mentors.

### **Staffing**

- I (Dawn Ravella) coordinate and serve as liaison to the various aspects of the program: mentor selection and trainings, participant outreach and selection of and communications with presenters. I also facilitate the storytelling process.
- Marie Dunn, Fordham Social Work Intern, provides clinical case management in her second year of placement with this program.
- Mercedes Riley, MSW, sponsored by the Beck Institute, works directly with mentors and attends all sessions.
- Diana Ortiz, an executive at Exodus and graduate of Coming Home is the peer facilitator.
- Vincenza Corcoran, Social Work professor at Fordham, with expertise in trauma informed care supervises me as I learn about trauma and how to manage many different helping professionals and program development.

### **Core Components**

The core components of the CH program are the Mentors, the Curriculum/Structure, Volunteer Congregant Presenters, Case Management, Community, Facilitation/Coordination, Trauma-Informed Care, Preparation/invitation for evaluation

## **Mentors**

### ***Recruitment***

Currently all mentors are members of The Reformed Church of Bronxville and participate as part of their commitment to faith in action. Several have previously served as mentors in the program and some are first-time participants. (In the past we have used mentors from other congregations who wish to replicate the program so they could experience ours first.)

### ***Selection***

I recruit and interview potential mentors, relying on relationship, experience and reputation within the congregation. I also use an application form, asking why they want to do this, background, etc. There is now a pool of church members who have served as mentors in prior cycles; this is a great asset and empowers mentors to support others.

### ***Matching***

Participants and mentors are matched by the team considering interests, goals, commonalities and personality traits.

### ***Training***

Extensive training for mentors was provided before we began our first Coming Home. This included 15 weeks of one hour sessions during the Sunday morning Christian Education slots and two evenings (offered at the time the CH program would be offered since we knew those attending would have that time slot available). Much of the training was general and two evenings were specifically for mentor skills.

The Program provides mentor training prior to each series:

- All day training by Tina Reynolds about the lives of the participants: violence, incarceration, racism, political/social history, criminal justice system, cultural competency.
- Trainings by Dawn, Marie and Tina in June and July. Listening skills workshops and Tina's training on the impact of prison on women when they return to the community were particularly effective.
- Two evenings at the church by Dawn and Mercedes in mentoring and the program specifics, the role of the mentor, the value of the mentor, boundaries.
- Additional training provided by Tina on trauma-informed care.
- Other trainings led by Dawn, Sean Pica and Pat Charles have included cultural awareness-sensitivity-boundaries, mentor tips, mock mentoring sessions, suggestions for session one, resources available to mentors
- Opportunity to participate in Beck mentor trainings at Fordham University Lincoln Center.

### ***Mentors' roles***

Mentors begin in the fourth week of the program, attending the dinner and the goal setting session along with participants. They are matched after that session. They then attend five sessions where they work directly with participants on setting and achieving their goals. They are encouraged to talk or meet weekly to build relationships and work on goals.

### ***Communication with mentors***

Mercedes meets with Mentors after each program session in another room to debrief them on their experience with participants and provide ongoing support, information and referrals. Mercedes is also responsible for sending summaries of sessions to the mentors who do not attend.

## **Core Components: Curriculum/Structure**

- Participants meet once a week for eighteen weeks plus one evening for graduation and one for Speakers Night.
- The first several sessions are planned, but some later sessions are left open to allow for flexibility to meet the needs of the group. A printed schedule is available with all program dates and subjects.
- Orientation: overview of the program, one-on-one interviews with Dawn and social work interns; participants are given access to RCB clothing bank, and the opportunity to participate in yoga.
- Each evening is structured the same: dinner, touch in, reflection, guests are excused, a class, closing ritual.
- Mentoring (5 sessions) mentor and mentee have a private session in breakout rooms.
- Graduation, open to friends, family and supporters, includes an opportunity for graduates to share their story and their goals.

### **The classes are all led by volunteer congregant presenters:**

- Empowerment for Change (Tom Rodman's ACORN presentation)
- Self-Image and Values (led by Rev. Dr. Ken Ruge)
- Developing a Support System (led by Jim Wickline)
- Goal Setting (by Teri Scheinzeit)
- Speaking your Truth (led by Dawn and graduate, Theo Harris)
- Conflict Management
- Healthy Relationships/Families (led by Rev. Dr. Jim Walkup)
- Time/Money Management (by Lisa Connors)
- Healthy Living (Vincenza Corcoran)
- Speakers' Prep/Speakers' Night (by Mary Civiello)

- The World of Work (2 sessions led by Pat Drew and David Westin)
- Education for Justice (Marc Greenberg, David Walker, Glenn Martin)
- Computer skills (by Violet Wade)
- Looking to the Future/Education.

Through sharing of your story there can be self-acceptance, forgiveness, renewal, recognition of strengths and gifts and purpose to grow and move forward. Although most of the sessions are led by the participants, I have learned to be the primary facilitator during this process which uses a “guidelines for sharing” model from Catholic Charities. It gives the participant a chance to share their story in a safe environment. Others can ask for clarification or for more information; they may question, but not comment, on the story. We developed questions to guide the process which includes stories from the past, the sharing of current goals and looking ahead toward the future.

Using Joseph Campbell’s *Hero’s Journey* as a model, participants identify significant turning points in their lives, what followed, and the growth that resulted from it. A graduate or the peer facilitator models the process and tells her story. Each participant gets a journal to write in, and takes turns sharing with the group. They are encouraged to write in their journals and to write the story themselves. Mary Civiello, a communications expert, works with participants on the narrative and participants like working with a “pro.” No one is required to share their story at graduation, but to participate in the program sharing some things are agreed upon. Participants are never asked to share anything that they are not comfortable with. Mentors check in on helping them with stories, but most participants want to do it themselves.

- Participants were given questions to answer: Where were you born and raised? What would you like to share about your family? What was it like growing up? What would you like to share about life before incarceration? What

would you like to share about your time during incarceration? What has been the most difficult thing about coming home? What has been the most surprising thing since you've been home? What are your hopes for the future? What special gifts do you have to offer? What do you want other people to know and understand about you? What concerns do you have about sharing your story? How do you think others might benefit from sharing your story?

- Or participants can use a worksheet to help them access memories: I remember when I was a child...I remember first time I...I remember first time I realized...One of the best things that ever happened to me was...I remember my mother (or father) used to... I always laugh when... the best (or worst) day of my life was...The most difficult thing for me right now is...When I am feeling down I draw for strength on...One thing that always gives me hope is...I look forward to the day when...

- Answering the questions was healing for participants and educational for congregation and staff

- He said it brought up a lot of stuff that he tries not to think about and it was hard to answer. (Evan)

- After sharing his story, Michael returned the next week to say he felt so relieved and happy after he shared that when he returned home his wife didn't believe he was with us at the church, she thought he was up to no good

- The stories were very powerful for congregants: "I could understand how he ended up in prison. I would have made the same choices." (James)

### **Case management**

Marie, a social work intern, will meet at least once and as needed with each participant to track goals, to assist them with various issues (particularly mental health support when issues arise, trauma triggers, etc.) Along with mentors and Mercedes she assists with linkages to vocational/educational/housing resources and other needs.

Emergency funds can be made available through the Deacon's fund, but it is given to the

helping organizations to which the participants are connected to, rather than directly to the participant. We decided that if emergencies come up, rather than decide on our own we will call in two graduates who are social workers to help with the decision making and planning.

### **Community**

Participants share meals prior to each session with staff, church members. Home-cooked meals are prepared and graciously served by church members on china, with tablecloths, table decorations. Mentors may attend all dinners and stay through reflection, which they often do. Their presence is important to participants and to their own education and strengthens the congregation's commitment to this work. Mentors invite participants to services and other events at the church, or in the community. Participants and mentors and invited guests of participants share Speakers' Night and Graduation. All meals are prepared by church members.

### **Trauma-Informed Care**

Staff and mentors received training from Tina Reynolds and the Beck Institute on trauma-informed care. The program strives to eliminate surprises; agreements, agenda, and assigned tasks are listed and posted at each session. At every opportunity, participants are made part of the decision making process. Diana leads a debriefing after each session.

### **Preparation/invitation for evaluation**

Elaine and Debbie came to the program to talk about the evaluation a week before the initial evaluation. Some participants had concerns about the process and wanted time to think about it and make their own choice about whether to participate. Ultimately, all

participated in the baseline evaluation process and gave positive feedback to the facilitators. Program will have a one-month reunion and staff is planning for other ways of maintaining contact to keep alumni connected to the program.

In spite of this powerful experience, more needs to be done. Craig's story reflects the reality faced by the participants even after successfully completing the program.

*Craig takes a bus to work in the supermarket at 6am. Public transportation in Westchester is difficult if you're not on the metro north line. It takes him over an hour to go where it would take 20 minutes with a car. His recent promotion to manager of the seafood department came without a pay increase. He tries to remain positive that the increase in workload and pressure are worth the experience and good for his resume. It's helpful to think of this job as a stepping stone but it's not clear where to. He earns more than minimum wage, \$8.70 per hour and finally only works 24 hours a week. He was able to work 37 hours a week during the holidays. Health benefits are extremely helpful. Still the co-payments and the uncovered costs like a recent biopsy are a stretch. \$800 a month is barely enough to cover rent let alone: food, children, health care, and transportation.*

*He can't get an apartment, a car, car insurance, clothes for children. He has taken a second job in the evening at St. Johns Hospital. He volunteers to "give back" to the community by working with at-risk youth to help them avoid making the same mistakes he made. He lives on Mom's couch. He keeps trying. He gets exhausted. He struggles to manage his anger. It's not good for his relationship as he has no privacy. He does whatever he can for work—construction, handyman, moving, odd jobs...anything. He has worked at our church clothing closet sale and volunteered to assist the CH program even after he knew there would not be a stipend for his position. He is always*



*eager for any work and does it with a positive attitude. He is reliable and trustworthy. Sometimes he gets angry and asks for help. I understand. He keeps trying. He gets exhausted and still he tries to stay positive. It is a sad reality when a hard working ambitious person cannot make a living wage to have a life of dignity.*

## CHAPTER 6 EVALUATION

“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability.” - Martin Luther King Jr. (also used as lyrics in song for the *Opening Doors* documentary)

### **Sherrie**

*Before Sherrie, when I was interviewing the men to participate in the Coming Home program, I ordered pizza because I thought it would be much nicer for them than my cooking. Then Sherrie took over. Under her direction each Coming Home participant was welcomed each week as a valued guest of honor. Her volunteer staff respectfully served delicious food on fine china. Very quietly, behind the scenes, Sherrie manifested a very beautiful ministry which created a very large ripple effect; allowing relationships to build that were as beneficial to our congregants as they were to the CH participants.*

*For eighteen weeks Sherrie organized all of the meals and chefs; she was flexible, reliable, unflappable and generous as she added a large component of love to the program. The program was hugely successful, drawing attention from many prison organizations and other faith communities: Evan is now in a PhD. program and has opened his first bank account; Michael has relieved much of his debt; Thomas has opened an email account, now has a computer and every day is improving his literacy; Will is working and recently received a promotion; the list goes on....What Sherrie has done cannot be measured in this way, yet. With her invaluable contribution RCB held sacred space to break bread with the newest members of our extended family. It wasn't part of the original plan, but under Sherrie's leadership a powerful healing ministry unfolded. It is my humble (yet seasoned) opinion that Mission cannot just be evaluated in terms of programs. When the members of our congregation are empowered to step up and live the Gospel message while making their unique contribution to the world, then "mission" truly is realized. Sherrie is such a shining example of this. Let's take a moment to give thanks for Sherrie and honor her leadership.*

*- Dawn giving certificate of appreciation to Sherrie at Field Club Consistory gathering May 2010*

## **Part 1. Evaluation**

### **Methods and Data Collection**

**A. Focus Groups** (with questionnaire)—To understand peoples' investments and perceptions I conducted focus groups using a convenience sample offered at three different times. I publicized the groups in the church bulletin and through email. Three different groups met with approximately ten participants in each. Participants all signed a release, filled out a questionnaire (see appendix E) and contributed to a one-hour discussion which was recorded and then transcribed. Themes from the focus groups are reported in Part 2 of this evaluation chapter.

### **B. Measured attendance at outside events to show the range of involvement:**

1. ***Zero Percent***—was held in the RCB Edwards Room and advertised through church communications and local publications. We measured by attendance and feedback from the audience.
2. ***The Castle***—was held in the RCB Edwards Room and advertised through church communications and local publications. Following the film we held a panel discussion led by Hudson Link Alumni. We measured by attendance and feedback from the audience.
3. ***CH graduation***—CH graduation was held at RCB for program graduates, their friends and families. We also invited the congregation and alumni via email and posts in the church bulletin. We measured success by numbers in attendance, feedback at the event and in follow-up discussions and emails.
4. ***Documentary*** - Experienced filmmakers gave me instructions on how to create a short documentary intended to shed light on our ailing U.S. criminal justice system, introduce the Coming Home program at RCB and to inspire action. It was shown to the consistory of the church, posted on Facebook and emailed to congregants and others involved in prison ministry. A Survey

Monkey survey was used to follow-up and to explore the video's impact on the viewers.<sup>98</sup>

5. **Empowerment Sunday**—A worship service similar to Rye Presbyterian Church and Justice Sunday, led mainly by returning citizens and graduates of NYTS and Hudson Link. I met with the preacher ahead of time to describe the congregants and the history of the CH program so that he could send a message to best meet the congregants' needs and move us toward the direction we wanted to go to. I met with every speaker to prepare them, so the worship service would most resemble the format of a traditional RCB worship service.

**C. Evaluation with Fordham**—I enlisted support for outside independent evaluation with goals:

1. Process evaluation to provide information to further develop the program.
2. Focus groups were used to measure participant satisfaction. These were taped and transcribed. Graduates were invited back to RCB for a meal before interviews and groups. All participating signed a release form, were given a \$25 stipend and transportation reimbursement.
3. **Review of Mentors**—Mentors were part of focus groups made up of approximately ten people. Each signed a release and was asked questions to determine how the experience was for them.

I worked closely with Fordham to organize and set up the groups of mentors and participants but was not present during this set of interviews or focus groups.

**D. Dawn as a participant observer**—I gathered information with interactions from the congregation at large, at program sessions, events, staff meetings, mission council and consistory. Feedback was collected in discussions with those involved in the program,

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<sup>98</sup> This thesis uses a 7-minute documentary to shed light on our ailing U.S. criminal justice system, introduce the Coming Home program at RCB, and inspire action. The documentary is visible on YouTube at the following address: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwGvwZb5v\\_k](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RwGvwZb5v_k).

and I continued to make changes to improve the program based on the information I gathered using a participant action research approach.

**E. Products that resulted from the social justice initiative**—We documented outcomes of the initial social justice work in the following:

1. A mentor's instructional manual for our program and others
2. Ongoing Coming Home programming
3. Participation in the learning collaborative with Beck to develop an evidence-based model for people in transition
4. Support to Riverside Church for their Coming Home Program
5. Our Yonkers Opening Doors Initiative, an asset based community development project targeting the Nodine Hill section of Yonkers, as well as connections to other restorative justice efforts that are in the development stage.

## **Part 2. Evaluation**

### **Report on Findings, What it Means**

#### **A. Themes from focus groups**

**How immense the struggles are for people returning from prison.** Financial issues, securing a job, the great personal struggles within family relationships, navigating public transportation, getting an apartment and even getting a library card. Tasks from large to small were now part of a daily struggle to assimilate into the community. The amount of patience a returning citizen must possess when dealing with the systems of parole, housing and employment is staggering. The constant deluge of issues were eye-opening...the denial of public housing or the right to even visit a family member in public housing...entire families burdened with great needs and ongoing struggles. Coming Home

helped many RCB congregants realize that incarceration affects the lives of many people, creating a ripple effect much like Sherrie's ministry but in a negative manner, that could be devastating to more than just the person who is incarcerated.

**Understanding of the systemic issues.** There's a social imbalance that exists in today's world, proven by the fact that someone from a poverty stricken zip code has a much higher likelihood of ending up in prison than a person raised in an affluent or even middle class neighborhood. It's disturbing that innocent children born into poverty have the odds so heavily stacked against them.

- Some communities rely on prisons for economic stability. We continue to enslave people legally. Prison as a form of ongoing slavery through convict leasing continues to this very day. African Americans have been historically used as cheap labor in this country.
- There is money to be made on people in prison as evidenced by the prison for profit industry that has sprung up in recent years.
- Poor people are up against such bad odds of making it due to the cradle to prison pipeline.
- Understanding of the difference between personal poverty and the prison industrial complex.
- "People think, 'Well, someone did something bad, they deserve to be in there. But then you hear some of the stories—like being locked in a basement—and you realize, 'Who knows how that affected his personality?'"
- There is still such an image about who commits crime, but it's not the doctor who is doing Medicare fraud. There probably are people sitting in the pews in Bronxville who have committed crimes or things that should be crimes but are legal.

- Give a man a gun and he can rob a bank, give a man a bank and he can rob the world.

**Many people were moved by the changes they saw take place in the participants.** They were also surprised by their own reactions and changes in thought processes.

- Participants' strength and faith was inspiring, people are resilient. People change. The program is powerful.
- Some learned to be more compassionate and forgiving. "There but for the grace of God go I." "If I were in those circumstances the same thing would have happened." "These are normal people who made a mistake." "This could happen to anyone." Increased awareness of stereotypes. Kids in Bronxville are doing drugs, drinking, have some of the same issues but are protected by parents and an insular close knit community.
- Despite enormous obstacles, people are still motivated to change and take responsibility for their actions.
- "Just that there are people who have so much going against them, it's a surprise that they make anything of, and then to just see these guys making something of it, it's inspiring. And a joy to watch, so, it's weird because in some way it's very, very personal, probably in ways that I'm not even aware of—I could have easily been dead."

One of the most beautiful things to come from our Prison Ministry is the change that took place in the hearts of both the participants and the congregants, and the relationships that developed.

- We were afraid in the beginning and now we have friendships with participants and there's a change in attitude in the congregation. The congregation has softened in the process.

- The personal stories are touching—once you learn someone’s story and personal circumstances, it changes how you feel about them.
- Surprised and impressed with the trust that was built and the relationships that formed. Its community.
- It’s great when one’s unique gifts and skills can be put to use to help someone else.
- We are all alike and all connected. It’s great to get out of the head for once and also have a heart connection.
- You just hear their story, you meet somebody personal and then the fear goes way, way down.
- Well, I see that as God, that’s holy. For me, that’s so remarkable there is no explanation other than there is something bigger than me. That’s the God that I see, because they are up against so much.
- He was locked up in the basement and fed dog scraps. He feels his whole life has been a blessing and he’s grateful for all of it.
- I’m guessing Jesus listened a lot and was able to hear people in his speech, hear cricket stories. Like that’s a Jesus I can believe in. But the Jesus that comes alive in crickets and people hiring other people in the nursery, that’s a Jesus I can believe in.
- Everybody again is running through life and surviving and not taking the time to be personally connected. If you’re personally connected, then you’re more responsible about not doing things. If you’re connected you’re more aware, willing to make a difference.

**Many expressed that this is important work; prison ministry is doing God’s work.**

- Makes me realize how grateful I should be. Puts my struggles into perspective. Reminds me to turn to God more often.
- Faith gives people hope



- Could clearly see God at work in the participants
- We had growing pains but are learning. Studying Biblical passages about Jesus 'love for the prisoner' was helpful
- Holiness is just there, and listening to that and being present to that affects my spirit. It encourages my spirit, it's hopeful, and it's the slowing down, it's the stopping and shift.
- I do feel a lot of energy around inspiration. Without a doubt, these stories that I've heard and people from the program and their accomplishments are very inspiring, and your accomplishments are very inspiring to me. That would be a big enhancement to my spirituality
- I'm surprised because before I would have judged these people and looked at them very differently

Public policy and systemic change is important too. People learned some resources. "Now that prison is on my radar screen I stay tuned in and connected." Some mentioned *The New Jim Crow*. Some thought we should talk more about racism. Others thought this would just scare people away. Some thought we should work with juveniles or try to get the problem earlier on before incarceration. Time is an issue for why more RCB folks aren't getting more involved. People felt that fear and judgment is what kept people from doing more

### **Themes from focus groups with mentors (both 2010 and 2011)**

These focus groups were conducted by Beck Institute of Religion and Poverty, Fordham University Graduate School of Social Work, as an outside independent evaluation with mentors.

## **Meaning of Prison and lives before and after**

- Discovered the life stories and hard realities of the life of the men who had been incarcerated for between 15 and 25 years.
- Expressed that if they had lived in such difficult circumstances as these men that they too might have been involved in fights leading to prison.
- There but for the grace of God go I.
- They were taken aback to learn about the extreme situations they had lived in before prison.
- Had concern that they did not know enough to help these men.
- Also were initially concerned that some harm could come to them either in the immediate relationship, or because of the relationship—such as retribution for upsetting them in some way.
- The reality that people could be pushed to such violence was of concern—and what this means for how these individuals cope with their anger and other feelings. Mentors were aware that the reason for prison was violent crimes, in many cases manslaughter.
- It was difficult to learn how they had to live in prison. They had no idea about prison life – the hardness of it, and realizing that you could never, never trust anyone.
- There was admiration expressed for the discipline and accomplishment of all of those with whom they worked, those who had gained education and had goals that were focused on next steps to income and stability—as in the face of adversity and the fact that in confinement they had worked to turn their lives around. It was a transformative experience for both the mentor and mentee
- Both mentor and mentee learned
- Some relationships still ongoing, mentee calls, asks for advice regarding starting a business, solving problems.
- Not all had good working relationships.
- Felt everyone got a lot, participants, their family and the church

- Felt structure was key, when they came, when meetings were held, agenda when certain things were discussed—there was a sense that they were part of something that was going someplace—there was a sense of responsibility that was emphasized.

## **The Experience Of Mentoring—How Do We Help As A Mentor?–**

### **Defining the Role**

- Unsure about how to help—unclear whether you are a guide, a friend, a counselor.
- Lots of talk about what it is like to just listen, and that this is important, accepting, not judging, being there as a sounding board.
- Recalled that they were told to be supportive and listen.
- Heard the message that listening is important as a help, but also they know that there are other ways of helping—and it is natural to do so—as it is hard not to respond to the range of needs that are identified. This is particularly so when there are pressing needs—and you do not know how to help with the problem solving around getting housing, jobs, and ways of understanding the systems that need to be navigated.
- Realized that they wanted to push their mentee—and it was a challenge to go at their pace—and difficult to work out what was the next step. Expected them to have internal motivation to move forward when support was given. So it could be frustrating to see them slowly think about goals, rather than moving ahead.
- Didn't know what the limits were: could they call at home, or work, anytime.

### **What Mentors Need**

- Need more support and guidance, examples, resource guides, as well as a way to process concerns.
- Realized that they often did not have the answers to the mentees' needs and this was frustrating—for example it was so difficult to get housing, and they did

not have the information that would be helpful to sort out how to go about getting housing when you had been in prison.

- Wanted to have some concrete resources to offer—as support meant also being able to follow through and help with priorities in terms of urgent needs. Basic information would help, like if parolee went to their family to live, the family could lose Section 8.

### **Time with Mentees**

- Needed more time with mentee: Realized that it was difficult for their mentee to trust them—it took time, and often there was not enough time to talk and get to know each other—to build a relationship. How do you reverse 25 years of distrust? How are they to be straight with us when this is not how they have learned to cope because of so much untrustworthiness?
- Wanted more time to talk and develop relationships

### **Understanding what the mentees experience has been in prison**

- It was an eye opening experience—never had the opportunity to understand what prison was like and the experience of those who paid their time. More introduction to what to expect would have been helpful
- A window was open to the struggles of people who live in different worlds than those in the church community.
- Some noted that talking to their mentee initially was scary at first, but then they became real people to them—and when they shared their challenges—it was a revelation—about who they really were.
- Some emotional things came up and did not know what to do

### **The match between mentee and mentor**

- For some it was productive—a good fit.
- For others it was difficult to connect and meet their needs.
- Appreciate that time went into making the match—so they knew interests and experience were considered in making the match.

- Majority seemed to feel that they worked well together.
- When it did not work—the mentor was disappointed that the mentee was not responsive.
- Hard to connect when life style so foreign—multiple wives and their children.

**What was the experience like in helping mentee with goals?**

- Use of the materials that were handed out to follow
- Attendance at the session given on setting goals—it was inspiring and provided good guidelines.
- Tom Rodman was impressive with his lecture and ACORN—helpful to everyone
- Reviewing how the goals fit with reality—what was possible rather than pie in the sky hopes
- Felt book for goal setting excellent
- It seemed that it did not matter as much what goals, but that you were involved in the process
- Key is look at what are the steps to the goal and then thinking is it possible to do the steps
- Need to emphasize how to help with short term and long term goals and understanding the difference
- Discussing goals and listening to the mentee review plans
- Challenge was when the goal was unrealistic
- Challenge when mentee had difficulty grasping how things were done in the business world, and in general how people worked in the business world.
- Difficult to partialize and see next steps for some goals
- Felt misled that mentee said would do one thing and then did not follow through—seemed it was because of cost

- Issue of credibility were a concern

### **General comments about mentoring**

- Felt being with them at dinner helped connection
- Learned that just being with someone, not even talking matters
- Selection of who participates matters
- Need to be in a position to provide more help (re-employment, house, for example)
- Didn't know enough about basics regarding concrete needs—so I felt inept and frustrated.
- Hard to work when there was no chemistry in mentor/mentee match.
- Challenge to balance life skills with mentoring work.
- Could have used more support. Suggested having a couple of sessions where mentors get together and share ideas and experience, perhaps while mentees are doing the formal sessions (we now have special mentor meetings following every mentor session. We also have a social worker available each week to work with the mentors and to send an email following each weekly session so they're aware of the topic covered and how it went.)
- Would have benefited from more of an orientation as to what a mentor does.
- Would have valued critical information about coming out of prison, what to expect, what does parole mean re: curfew etc. (this has been added. The Westchester County DA's office speaks to us and we have compiled a tutorial.)
- Think the 6 sessions is too few, need more, not all the sessions participants do, but definitely more—maybe 12.
- Need more assistance to understand what the experience of post incarceration is like—difficulty re-entering the world after so many years; would be helpful

to have someone who has come back and been ok to talk with the group (past group facilitator?)

- Need more of an orientation and materials to refer to: web sites, literature, etc.
- Helpful to talk with past mentors.

### **General comments about the program**

- Important to eat with mentees.
- Felt not all readings were inspirational.
- Understood that the point was to help people speak up.
- Roles were important.
- Rituals important.
- Run like a business—this helped.
- People were encouraged to participate and they bloomed.
- The stories seemed important.
- Some felt keep stories short.
- Stories recited at graduation—important—proud to tell them.
- Like evaluations of each meeting.
- Wondered about attending all meetings, some felt it helped understand what they were focusing on, others it was a bit much.
- What is the cost of the program?
- How can other churches afford to do this type of program—how can it be affordable.
- How do you impact those less able?
- Extraordinary group of offenders—educated and goal oriented.
- Some sessions were not helpful, as one following Rodman's on goals.

- People who present talk too much—Presentations do not leave enough time for the participants to discuss and make sense of the focus.
- Someone was hurt when they were not asked to present second lecture.
- Need to target real needs of participants—not just to fill up sessions.
- Felt it would be helpful to know what went on in sessions if you could not be there and were not there—such as tape or on YouTube.
- Realized mentors were unsure about whether they were invited to dinner, really wanted more time to talk with mentee.
- Would have appreciated a syllabus re the program so that they knew what was discussed so as to incorporate it in conversation, etc.
- Felt that this life skills program was not adapted enough for the population it was provided for.
- Dawn needed more help—too much was on her plate to manage—too many cooks trying to shape the program—chaos.

**How is faith connected to this experience?**

- Luke 10 love God/ love your neighbor
- Ex of good discipleship
- Faith in action
- People were really concerned
- People from such diverse life experiences connecting, very meaningful
- Impressed with church for doing this
- Helped me connect to people in the church
- Most important thing I have done
- Enriched my religious experience
- Showed me how they connected as a community



- We were adjunct to the group but still part of it
- Some came to services, but it was a huge distance from where they lived – some traveled for hours to get here.

## **Part 2**

### **B. Special Events**

#### *Zero Percent*

The film *Zero Percent* was shown twice to the RCB congregants. *Zero Percent* refers to the percent of recidivism for those who received education inside Sing Sing through Hudson Link for Higher Education. For the first viewing, 30 people attended and agreed it was so worthwhile that they offered to help publicize it for a second show. The second show brought in 120 people, 4 times the size of the first audience. This was powerful and educational for the RCB congregants, as well as empowering for the panelists who were either featured in the film or graduates of Hudson Link. An unexpected additional outcome came when a panelist interrupted a group of 12 young people who were about to exit and asked them if they had questions. The group was from a youth facility and the dialogue that took place was meaningful for everyone involved as panelists were sharing their wisdom with this group of younger men. The younger men clearly respected them and wanted to know there was a different path. The rest of the audience was in awe of the power of what was being witnessed.

#### *The Castle*

I knew the Castle was well attended and really started a buzz at the Church, but I had no idea of the ripple effect of this event until I did the focus groups. This was a high impact event that left an impression on many people that continued long after they left the play. Many of the RCB church folks came and expressed how moved they were. A

group from a nearby youth facility in Valhalla came and it was striking how seriously they took the production. Phil a teacher, showed the Castle at his school, which led to many of the students he worked with opening a dialogue about incarceration for the first time. They began to share stories of family members and loved ones who are incarcerated. It was a powerful healing and bonding experience.

### **CH Graduation**

Graduation events are particularly powerful in this program. After 18 weeks the graduates are celebrated for their commitment and hard work. Family members and church folks come together for a ceremony in the Edwards room which is beautifully decorated for the special occasion. The first graduation we had 40 RSVPs, so we planned for 75 since RCB congregants have a reputation for not RSVP'ing. Well over 100 came and we had to add chairs. Graduates are then allowed to 'share their story' to those that attend and each is given a role in the ceremony. Mentors follow by presenting graduates with a certificate, some have expressed that this is the first time they have completed something and for others it's the first acknowledgement of their success. Families from both sides of the prison divide are brought together further illustrating the need for community. Following the ceremony I always receive numerous positive emails from congregants and participants:

- *Thank you for the opportunity to hear the stories of the men from the Coming Home program. They spoke with such honesty and forthrightness. It was a privilege to witness them. Thank you for giving us so many chances to live our faith. love, Harriet*
- *I enjoyed every minute of it. The guys did really well. You should be really proud of the wonderful work you are doing. Please send me Shawn's number, I want to talk to him about hiring the guys to paint and do some work in my building. I hope we do more of this! Pat*

- *I don't think it is an overstatement to say that virtually everyone present found it very inspiring. Marc*
- *Once again I want say how wonderful the dinner was. I am truly impressed with your church's commitment to help in the rehabilitation of men who have already paid their debt to society. The plight is close to my heart as I have a brother in prison who may be facing the same challenges upon his release. It must be a God incident that I ran into Gregory on the train. Please let us know if I can learn more about this program. - Marjorie*

## **Documentary**

I began by interviewing some experienced filmmakers to receive guidance:

Macky Alston, Dale Lindquist, David Dircks and Thatcher Drew. I learned lots of tips about camera placement, lighting, how to keep the subject relaxed and software for editing. We ended up using an iPhone with an external lavalier mic. The most common piece of advice from the experts was to keep it short and simple.

The point I wanted to make through the use of narratives was basically for RCB folks and participants: how has your life changed? Mary Civiello helped me narrow the focus of possibilities and create a narrative using Craig's story: take the bus with him to work at 6am; show him living on his mom's couch in a small apartment, working long hours, still unable to make ends meet. The documentary however turned out completely different than I had originally intended. The original goal was to keep it between 3-5 minutes:

1. With film clips and quotes of congregants and participants about their experience,
2. A short moment on "Yonkers Opening Doors project" to educate about the cradle to prison pipeline
3. A day in the life of a grad to show more needs to be done.

The intent was to highlight difficult systemic issues that make it a challenge to create a stable sustainable life of dignity.

None of this made it to the final video. Emily Bierwirth, the original filmmaker, took a lot of film footage at events and interviewed many mentors, volunteers and participants. She did a tremendous amount of good work. I loved how she was organizing the documentary but it needed to be done within the time frame acceptable to NYTS which became problematic. Emily recently graduated college, entered the workforce and wasn't able to commit the hours she thought would be available. This is a common issue when working with all volunteers.

The work was eventually left to the hands of Glen Roethel (aka nice husband). He used some of Emily's work and I added a narrative. I was originally concerned about it sounding condescending, especially the part where it shows sad children's faces in black and white. The music included one of Glen's songs that I love, "People of the Earth" which the children in the church have sung in worship, and a song that uses words from a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. The feedback from most church folks was very positive. David Westin, Mission chair and site team member, played it at the Consistory. People were clearly attentive, then clapped and signed up to participate in the next series. I also emailed it to the congregation, some others who have shown interest in prison ministry, and posted it on Facebook.

My original plan was to show it at coffee hour following worship service and hand out questionnaires but I was unable to get approval to implement that. Although the documentary was geared to RCB and congregations like it, only a small percent of congregants used the Survey Monkey. The largest reply was from people who I knew outside the congregation. Here are some responses to the documentary—initially very positive and then constructive criticism to follow:

- Timothy Shelley called me up so moved and left a beautiful, inspiring voicemail. He expressed his desire to write a letter once a month to someone in prison. A couple of months later he followed up and we spoke about the possibility of hiring and training returning citizens to work in his pizzeria.
- Sean and Lori Pica asked to post it on their website, Hudson Link for Higher Education, and also wrote an article about the documentary in their newsletter.
- Mount Saint Mary College, my alma mater, posted the documentary on their website.
- Several reposted on their Facebook walls helping to increase awareness.
- My meditation group passed it around to its members. Many replied and connected this work to their faith practice.
- Rye Presbytery passed it along and asked if they could have a hard copy on disk as well.
- Hudson River Presbytery asked if they could show it to their congregations.
- One person had just viewed a documentary about German prisons and concluded that when compared to US prisons were so much nicer and humane.

The general consensus from the Facebook community after I posted the video was one of support. People felt the work and successful communication of its intent validated this important work. People were inspired by the message and wanted to help continue to raise awareness. They were moved and encouraged me to continue forging ahead.

Constructive feedback was thought provoking and helpful:

- Lisa Kunstadter came to my office to express that she didn't like it. It was too warm and fuzzy. It didn't feel authentic or real. She was concerned that it didn't show the bad people in prison. The fact that not everyone is reformed. She also struggled with her view that it didn't give her instruction on what to do.

- Oralee appreciated my effort but based on her experience using media to educate during her time working in the California women's prison system, felt the video didn't move her. As she put it "it relied too heavily on inspiration and not enough solid information."

"Dawn, using media to educate people about issues is something I know too much about. I appreciate your effort here, but to be truthful—your approach in this video does not move me. It relies too much on inspiration and not enough on solid information. The most compelling fact was the zip code data—a stunning bit of information. But you dropped the ball. What of it? What do you want us to DO? What shall we make of these dramatic demographics? Sometime I will be glad to sit down with you and critique it if that serves you. I worked in a women's prison in California a long time ago. We let the women speak for themselves. They told the TV audience what they would like to happen when they got out and returned to their communities. They wrote their own 30-second PSAs and appeared in them. The hard part was getting TV stations to air public service. If you can accomplish that, it would be very useful. Anyway, thank you for asking my opinion. I hope you take this in the spirit it is intended—that you can do something closer to the bone. Much love and lots of support. Oralee"

Oralee I SOOO appreciate your input! And will take you up on the offer for a critique and whatever other experience you will share. It's no rush because I'm using this as part of the doctoral work so I can't make changes to it just yet until I submit the data from survey monkey. I really wanted to use first hand stories—the filmmakers wanted coverage of the program and we even have a public forum where people share their stories. **I stubbornly wouldn't allow cameras in because I wanted to protect the participants and thought first of creating a trauma informed safe environment. I'm sure there must be a way to do it. I thought it would be best to get this later after the program graduates are firmly on their feet, perhaps film a reunion.** I bet you have other ideas which I would really appreciate! Also I was trying to keep it 3-5 minutes and its 6-7. My intention was to show this at church coffee hour. It is written for church folks from RCB and churches like it with the hope to shed some light on the issue of incarceration, say a little bit about our program, and inspire church folks to do something. I'm getting a range of feedback, most of it very positive. Your input (and Tom's too) will really help me to do it better, which I need, want and appreciate!"

- "I wanted to learn more about your program at the Reformed Church, what specifically you guys did, what were the outcomes, etc.

- I thought it might be nice to elaborate, if possible, on some of the suggestions about different ways to spend the money spent on prisons. For example, instead of only stating that it should go to improving economic development, give stories or specific examples of it.”

### **Empowerment Sunday**

This was another high impact event. There was a captive audience since it was the regularly scheduled Sunday worship service. I wanted it to be exceptional since I’m aware that it’s a rare opportunity and my hope was to make it an annual event. Alfonso Wyatt preached and everyone was very moved, expressed how much they learned and what an incredible service it was.

I met Alfonso at a conference at NYTS and knew he would be a good fit for RCB. He paved the way for future services to be led by all formerly incarcerated folks. RCB takes great pride and care in the worship service so it was extraordinary that we were given this opportunity and I knew that if it were successful we could possibly make it an annual event. This year will be our second, Julio Medina will preach.

At our Tuesday staff debriefing of Sunday service, the discussion showed a tremendous amount of learning had taken place. The senior minister Ken mentioned that prisons are sold on the stock market. Addison expected that it would be a sermon to make us feel guilty, when in fact it ended up lifting up the work we are doing and was surprised at the gratitude expressed by CH participants and the impact our program has had. It was unlike our usual staff debriefings of Sunday services and it was clear that a lot of learning had taken place and there was critical thinking about the issues. It was a great way to inform the larger audience. All who participated in the service were well prepared which matters at RCB. One speaker spoke longer than the allotted time and I’ve been reminded

of that many times because the service ran over 10 minutes. Something that is generally unacceptable at RCB. In spite of that we are now planning our second and it looks like our successful trial has paved the way for an annual event.

The person who spoke longer than the allotted time wasn't given the same preparation as the others since he arrived late for rehearsal. I could have predicted that would happen when I heard the pastor preparing him. The pastor is used to RCB folks and wanting them to relax and feel calm. So he told Darryl to let the Spirit speak through him and I understood that Darryl might interpret that differently—another example of a cultural difference.

Consistory member Bill Hertlein suggested naming our systemic change project in Yonkers “Opening Doors“ which was a theme throughout Alfonso Wyatt’s Empowerment Sunday sermon. This sermon was used at the opening of the documentary. Joe Godfrey was very moved. He began attending CH dinners and developed a relationship with some participants. He is now working with Richard Pink on a worker owned construction business. His daughter decided to mentor. Sara Underhill, a pillar of the church since childhood, but not actively involved in mission, expressed how impressed and moved she was by the Empowerment Sunday service.



## **Part 2**

### **C. Evaluation With Fordham**

Beck Institute of Religion and Poverty was commissioned and funded to do an outside independent evaluation. (See Appendix D.) One outcome was that RCB then provided additional funding to create mentor manuals.

The data that I received is not traditional baseline data as it was collected after participants started the program. The data from the questionnaires includes a profile of participants, how they feel they changed as well as a consumer satisfaction report. Focus groups with participants further qualified the data.

There was consistent report of participants appreciation of the Coming Home Program indicated in the consumer satisfaction review and in the participant focus groups. The majority liked coming to the program, were able to get the services they needed, learned how to improve their lives in skills sessions, that met their expectations. They would recommend the program to others. The majority of participants felt they were more able to cope with their problems, and that they had people with whom they could do meaningful things.

Participants felt that staff was supportive and available; all believed that staff believe they could grow, change, and recover. All felt comfortable asking questions. The majority felt they were encouraged to take responsibility and were comfortable working with mentors on set goals. Similarly they indicated that mentors and staff understood their experiences and concerns and would stay in touch with them. Only one did not felt understood by their mentor and in general indicated that program staff did not meet their needs. Analysis of the standardized measure indicated that this individual was not as able

as others to make use of the opportunities the program offered. The majority valued developing their life story and appreciated the opportunity to share this with others.

The overall provision of this multidimensional program offered participants the essentials that are designated by SAMHSA (the substance abuse and mental health arm of the U.S. Department of health and Human Service) as critical for recovery, with a capabilities approach that emphasizes what people in transition can do. Recovery means developing a productive and meaningful life in community. The provision of an interim community experience is fundamental to people in transition, particularly those returning from prison. And while the program isn't focused on spiritual growth, the participants identified spiritual growth as important to them. One participant said, "I'm not a religious person but that social-spiritual connection is what got me here every week. Made it feel home." A number of participants felt they experienced spiritual growth and increased their involvement in a congregation.

There were many challenges that participants experienced as they sought housing and jobs and rejoined their families. The support offered in CH began a process for them to continue as they work toward goals. It's an arduous journey to return to a world that has changed dramatically. Their high hopes and preparation with education have not been enough to manage the changed terrain, particularly in the current economic climate. Partnerships with CH were seen as a beginning, with hope that more possibilities would emerge through connections they made here. They realize how difficult it is to transition back to community and what it will take to be successful. Many still do not have the needed skills. The challenge remains: how to continue to develop skills and pathways that will lead to success.

Most recently we learned through an interim report that the trauma levels of participants decreased significantly. They still have very high scores which are at PTSD levels, but it shows that what we are doing seems to be working and there is a need for continued work.

The SOC Scores (Sense of Coherence) measures won't be complete until the follow up evaluations are completed (hopefully after my graduation from NYTS). We learned that more than half the people in the program also need legal help, so we should consider including a legal session or making legal counsel available in some way. The research we are doing with Beck will continue thanks to a grant from the Casey Foundation.

**Some other findings:**

Participants are making progress and are supported in transition (acquiring housing, getting jobs) but there is a more important improvement in coping skills, a sense of belonging to community, and a diminishing sense of feeling lost, alienated and isolated.

Proselytizing is not part of the program, yet feedback showed that people went back to attending church after having attended the program.

Consumer satisfaction was reported. Participants knew they could trust us, and that we cared. This correlated with reductions in depression.

RCB folks were contributing to a sense of ability to cope and sense of wellbeing. We learned that human relationships matter. It matters that you're on someone's radar. Research shows hospitalizations are reduced when a person receives just one phone call a month.

## **Part 2**

### **D. Reflections From A Participant Observer**

I've learned that choosing the right mentors and providing support is crucial for the success of the program in a congregation like RCB. I've also learned that it gets easier with each series as more mentors gain experience and support each other. When we began, most mentors did not attend the different workshops and classes that were offered to prepare congregants for this ministry. This included 15 weeks of one hour sessions during the Sunday morning Christian Education slots and evenings (offered at the time the CH program would be offered, since we knew those attending would have that time slot available.) While many people attended, making it very worthwhile, mentors would have benefitted greatly from the experience of listening to returning citizens, learning about the issues they face, our current criminal justice system, reflecting on the Biblical call to restorative justice.

I stressed the importance to committing to five required mentor sessions before being accepted as a mentor. I over-emphasized this because of my experience working with volunteers who aren't always able to make volunteer work a priority, yet reliability would be important component for returning citizens to heal from the trauma of incarceration and learn to trust. This became a problem because people have very busy schedules and wanted to mentor but found the extensive training and time commitment prohibitive.

Finally I learned the need for flexibility, finding the right mentors who would be responsible to re-schedule mentor meetings if they were unable to make it, and through the use of technology I could tape trainings and email information to mentors who

couldn't make training sessions, offered many more extensive trainings and enlisted the support of Fordham to create mentor manuals.

I thought that some of the mentoring skills were common sense. This was *naïveté* on my part. Mentors wanted detailed instructions about how to be a good mentor. Now we have extensive mentor material, a tutorial for mentors online, as well as weekly meetings for mentor support led by a professional social worker. But in the interim, it was challenging and exhausting for me and I spent many hours with mentors doing one-on-one support.

When we began, apprehensive mentors chose to go through me for communications, uneasy about giving out their phone numbers. This wasn't sustainable. Now we ask as part of the mentor commitment to touch base weekly with mentee for 18 weeks, however that works best for the pair. Most pairs use email to touch base, others have phone calls and some meet for coffee.

The mentoring in most cases was powerful and transformational. In three cases it was not. In all cases I thought the mentoring process would be much easier than it actually was. Congregants were overwhelmed by the needs of participants. They felt an urgency to provide housing and jobs. Although I thought the church could provide their social networks, in fact the cultural gap was wider than I thought. RCB folks had no awareness of jobs or housing that matched the needs of returning citizens in our program. Although church folks wanted to be helpful, the issues of lack of affordable housing stock and how to access resources and social services were foreign to them. The jobs participants were trying to obtain were mainly in the social service field and the church folks were mostly in the financial field. Although the church folks were happy to share

social capital and social networks, in most cases, it was not really a match for the needs. Partnering with Hudson Link was the ideal experience. The self-selecting process meant that all of the participants had grit and a drive to succeed, a shared value with RCB folks.

My presence at the program allows me to use every opportunity and teachable moment to connect congregants' actions to their faith, to celebrate the many beautiful moments of Gospel in action, and to ask questions and encourage critical thinking on the issues. At the end of the series I host a prayer service and luncheon to honor the mentors and their work. There we make a direct connection to how they are responding to God's call by their selfless giving and caring, open hearts. This has been a very powerful addition.

There is a hidden second job of ministering to the volunteers, which I wasn't really prepared for. Many of the mentors and volunteers also experience crisis during the CH program and also need care and support through serious struggles: parenting issues, divorce, job loss, health issues, depression, addiction. One of the greatest things about working in a congregation like RCB is the high-achieving, high-power professionals. On the flip side of this strength is an edge that's a challenge. Some congregants are unstoppable toward their goals, and will go over my head if they don't agree with me. One example: Anna was locked up. She apparently used someone's credit card to purchase a mattress. She said it was an agreement with her employer that she was working with as a home health aide. The employer's daughter said she stole it. Before I could even wrap my head around what happened, I was reluctantly driving to the facility where Anna was being held with bail money from the church. A mentor was unhappy with my response to post bail money because we were not in the position to make the

determination about the correct thing to do, and the guidelines we had established included no exchange of money with mentors and participants. He went to the Pastor for Deacons funds and the pastor's initial reaction was that it was the right thing to do (quoting scripture). After discussion at a later date, he understood that this could be destructive to the program and we agreed that no money would be given to CH participants, and any future emergencies that we want to consider will be handled through a different process. We would enlist the support of another helping organization or construct a team to be part of the decision making. The team would need to include some participants or alumni (Craig, Derek, Darryl) as well as someone with social work experience.

### **Sustainability**

I was unprepared for the workload required to manage a volunteer driven multi-dimensional approach such as the Coming Home program. There should be a congregant or one person to coordinate the effort which requires about 20 hours a week during the time the program is operating. To operate this program as well as manage my other job responsibilities successfully is exhausting and I will surely burn out if I continue at this pace. Having said that, I'd like to report that I have survived and it has been worth every second of it and I'm committed to continue the effort! I've learned some useful tips:

Graduate Social Work students and seminarians are very helpful, also mutually beneficial as it provides students with a learning opportunity. Supervision hours are required at least 2 hours a week with MSW students, under a SIFI certified field instructor, plus weekly process recordings and quarterly evaluations. Seminarian

supervision requirements are more relaxed and both bring different skill sets that complement the program

- The program needs someone, other than a revolving student intern, who can be with the program on a longer-term basis to ensure consistency, program development and continuity in attending to the needs of participants and mentors. Best case is for this to be a congregant who is connected to relationships and resources within the community
- Structure and consistency is crucial
- The participants needed more support than had been anticipated; that has been challenging for all staff. Working with a referring agency is ideal.
- Participants' readiness for this program needs to be assessed.
- Three unhappy mentors caused a great deal of trouble and work. In hindsight I could have prepared them better, and also they probably weren't the right people to serve as mentors.

I've used the summer months to prepare for a program to begin in the fall. Prepare everything that can be prepared in advance: train mentors, assign volunteer chefs the dates they will provide a meal, schedule speakers, interview participants, have journals, nametags, room work orders. Then be prepared that things happen: people have emergencies, schedule changes, concerned spouses, etc.

The more experienced our congregation becomes, the easier it gets because we have established relationships with outside organizations and we've learned skills we can build on, information, referrals, resources, and have alumni to help us. We are better at understanding what a mentor needs to learn in order to be confident and aware of issues like racism, addiction, trauma, systemic poverty, and how the US criminal justice system works.



Congregants need support every step of the way in spite of extensive training prior to the program. It is important that they are reassured about the healing process they participate in while journeying with someone, believing in them all the while. It is also important that they have the appropriate referrals for participants so they are not getting involved in issues that require more expertise or money.

One of my favorite church folks who I often turn to for support encourages me to have patience with RCB congregants who he describes as having Type-A personalities or double AA or triple AAA. I do feel the effects of this culture on me and I believe part of the anxiety I experience at RCB is because I feel the anxiety of congregants and volunteers. When volunteers have a question or are anxious they want you to get back to them ASAP and are used to people getting back to them ASAP. There isn't always an understanding of the other responsibilities I'm tending to and that this is one of many programs under my direction. Fortunately I'm also aware that this anxiety is often fueled by the desire to do things well, which is a beautiful quality, but I need to learn to manage my own self-care and balance the best that I can.

The issues of jobs and housing created some anxiety among some of the RCB folks. They understood the pressing problems of employment and housing as critical to the success of individuals and families and understood the feedback loop that makes success out of reach without both housing and employment. It's hard to keep a stable home without a job. It's hard to keep a job without a home. We learned of the many "catch-22's" that returning citizens experience: curfew makes it hard to accept second or third shift jobs; people cannot return to family members homes without jeopardizing their Section 8 housing; and many other reentry barriers. Many employers do not want to hire

someone with an incarceration history. This is complicated by the lack of experience a person has applying for work in the ‘free world’ after years of incarceration.

Some congregants felt a sense of urgency that we prioritize and provide jobs and housing. We explored hiring a job developer or working closely with one of the agencies already doing this work. We explored working with STRIVE and funding a job developer through them but the request was for \$50,000, above the undesignated available funding through the mission benevolence budget. Eventually we moved to a place of understanding that we might be better off supporting the agencies that are better at providing those services, such as Osborne Association, Exodus Transitional Community, and Strive; and we should do what they cannot do in the same way, be a supportive church community. The longer I do this work, the more I am in awe of the power of a non-judgmental supportive community and believe that we will grow and learn how to make our best contribution while working collaboratively with returning citizens. This is an interactive learning process.

Trying to get funding for organizations doing reentry work was quite a challenge because in order to do that it meant taking away from another organization that had been receiving that grant. Initially we were able to do this through a pool of funds that has now been exhausted, but not before raising the expectations of recipients that they could receive funds annually.

By partnering with Hudson Link for Higher education, the first group of CH participants was self-selecting. These men had managed to get an education while in prison—not an easy feat, especially after Pell and Tap grants were eliminated within the prison system. These participants were a good match for RCB whose high-achieving

congregants could relate well to people who are driven to work hard to succeed.

Unfortunately, by the second year it was too difficult for Sean at Hudson Link to place participants to fill the program. We were hoping for 11 people to begin the next group, expecting that there would be some drop out but that enough would remain to still be a group. It has been a struggle each year to fill the group with appropriate participants. This needs more work and exploration because we know the numbers of returning citizens is a high number. There are church folks wanting to help. I think it's best if we partner with organizations that do this work to avoid problems that could arise. An example is a participant requesting money from a congregant. Once Gary Offner, a mission council member said "we are the opposite of street smart".

#### **Power of relationships:**

The Coming Home program at The Reformed Church of Bronxville was intended to help returning citizens while engaging the congregation in relationships that would be part of an education process; to move people to get more deeply involved in issues of poverty and injustice. It is my belief that people are changed and transformed through relationship. The folks at The Reformed Church of Bronxville are generous, faithful, intelligent, successful people who seek to do good. Much of the mission work has been through donating money to good causes and this is extremely helpful and a wonderful use of the gifts of RCB. Additionally the church is rich in untapped human potential to help others.

The relationships with people from different socioeconomic backgrounds would assist in a deeper calling to move beyond charity and apply critical thinking to issues of poverty through the lens of our faith. The possibility to engage such high achieving,

successful folks into another area of mission is inspiring and possibilities seem endless. The purpose of the ministry is a first step along the journey.

I think this program was successful beyond my imagination at engaging and educating people who were uninformed about prison issues. I will never forget the moment at Mission Council when we looked around at each other in disbelief at the congregants' responses, simultaneously ashamed and overjoyed at our underestimation of the RCB response. We were shocked at the number of people who turned out at events and volunteered. A record number of church folks and outside attendees came to all the events.

Despite some things being more difficult than I had expected—there was also something very powerful that happened that we didn't expect. Before even experiencing the program content it seemed that something good was happening. As I've learned more I realize we had begun to create a trauma safe space, where people were welcomed and received with love, without judgment and where great care would be taken to serve delicious food in a comfortable atmosphere, with reliable, nice people there, week after week. Sherrie had set and decorated the table each week with the church's finest china and holiday appropriate decor. Gay was there to welcome the men, would ask them to put their feet up while she served them tea waiting for the program to begin. Eventually participants started coming much earlier than the program began and would visit the clothing closet or make use of church office space, copy machine, computer, or just to relax. This was beautiful but also, at the same time part of the community was so welcoming, I knew there was another part of the community that kept a distance, observing to make sure nothing bad happened. The nursery school did not want anyone

on the premises before 3pm when school children could be around. I followed this so not to make waves and establish some success, but I knew that if participants found out about these requirements, it could be damaging to the safe welcoming community feeling that we had worked so hard to create. Fortunately the first group of participants were so impressive that not only weren't there problems but more and more people became interested and engaged.

- Some began a chess club with church volunteers and CH participants.
- Gay Reitz was supposed to cook the first night of the program. She is close to 80 years old, and it was so meaningful to her that after her cooking experience she showed up every week for the next 18 weeks to welcome them and serve tea while they waited for the program to begin. She called them her sons. This seemed to add a lot to the program. Although after it ended many people spoke more openly to me. As it turns out, Evan felt that it was condescending that she called them "boys". I understood it as she thought of them as her sons. He understood it differently. This was an eye opener for me and I learned that even though I check in with people throughout the process, it takes a long time to build the trust necessary for some persons to speak with you openly and maybe even longer before they might appreciate your most sincere words.
- Two social enterprises are under consideration in partnership with Coming Home graduates. With the support of his mentor one of the graduates replicated a variation of the program in Port Chester in partnership with the Rotary Club.
- We have just received approval for funding from Mission Council to implement a monthly alumni gathering. We will follow a structure similar to the current weekly meeting: meal, touch in, reflection, speaker, sharing, and closing. I hear from graduates at an increasing rate. I believe this is also an indicator of a need for ongoing support.

### **Some quotes from mentors at program evaluation:**

- Stoddard: “I have learned how similar I am to Gregory, feelings of inadequacy, yearning to be understood and accepted...This program was absolutely superb. This is what faith is about in my view.”
- Albert: “These gentlemen have a lot to offer and really want to restart their lives. I learned how hard people are willing to work when they have a second chance...I really enjoyed getting to know these men—learning and sharing, theirs’ and my experiences.”
- Todd: “I’ve learned about the challenges facing ex-offenders as they attempt to reenter society...I mostly enjoyed the happiness wrought from success of the mentors.”
- Lisa: “I learned what great guys these guys are. I also learned the difficulties society throws at them because of their record—housing, employment etc... I really enjoyed working one-on-one with the guys regarding their finances.”
- Sandy: “I have learned compassion in this program...I really enjoyed the fellowship”
- Jim: “I’ve personally learned what it means to listen...really listen and not come in with the attitude, “I’m gonna save this guy.” I learned that putting together a resume, asking how the day went, how’s his girlfriend doing—the everyday mundane stuff that most of us take for granted can often be quite challenging for a guy adjusting back to society and how he’s dealing with day to day stuff will tell you where his head is going. I learned as much about myself and my own shortcomings during my time associated with CH program. I also really enjoyed the group.”
- Ellie: “I have seen firsthand difficulties convicted felons face when released from prison, and again from firsthand experience understand why recidivism is so prevalent. The adjustment is very difficult.”

- Peter: “I learned how difficult it is for men returning to rejoin. I learned about a world I know nothing about.”
- Cathy: “This means a lot to me. I have learned so much from this experience and will be bummed when it’s over. xxoo”

**Some quotes from participants:**

- Derek: “I learned that there are a lot of people who want to help people that were incarcerated and have changed their lives for the better, and the good spirit of everyone. Thank you!”
- Michael: “At CH I learned the collective good willingness of others to open themselves up in such a free manner.”
- Evan: “I am now less fearful about opening up to others—especially about my personal experiences. People are not always judgmental, and most are genuine.”
- Jean: “I love my mentor Cathy, I think she is an angel.”

**Strengths** *As reported by participants:*

- Non-judgmental (“This is the only place I don’t feel judged.”)
- Supportive.
- People who believe in them.
- A lot of ‘experts’ helping them.

Tina Reynolds, Director of WORTH, (Women on the Rise Telling Her Story) wanted to join CH as a participant once she began coming to church to train the mentors.

Diana, the associate director of Exodus Transitional Community also requested and joined CH when she observed the program after coming with the intention to ask for funding.

The first night of the program is an ‘ACORN’ speech by Tom. He is Director of Deutsche bank and co-founder of STRIVE. His speech is so inspiring for participants as well as mentors that some church folks asked him to do it again and brought their kids.

Sherrie oversees all of the meals for Coming Home each week. She works with the church families who donate food, cook and serve, or she cooks herself. She has made such a contribution and the meal has become a very healing part of the experience. I mentioned before about how it’s always decorated for holidays and each week there is candles and fine china. She is going through a divorce and has told me privately how this program has saved her and it gives her meaning and something to look forward to each week.

My sweet husband, Glen became outraged as he learned about convict leasing and became motivated to become a political activist. Recently a friend wrote to me inquiring if he’d been hacked on Facebook because of all his postings.

I think it was very healing for congregants to be part of a group that created safe space and shared openly.

Our participants were willing to work in any capacity so Craig and Tom started doing construction work in congregant’s homes. Rosanne paid guys to do “habitat type” work with Jim in Habitat Westchester; Anita hired Craig as her driver; Lee used Derek and Craig as security for the Church clothing closet sales. People began to hire participants to do things in their homes. I recognized how fortunate we were that this was happening, but also how easy it would be for something to go wrong. Sue told me how two men in our program were working in her home and she felt so safe and comfortable there she would even leave them with her children there alone. I had to stop and question



her: *Would you leave other workmen alone in your home with your teenage daughter?* I believe that in an effort to be open, the pendulum had swung too far, and I'm so grateful there was never a 'mishap' because that could have been the end of the program.

### **Some Challenges**

It's a challenge to work with volunteers who are unable to make this their first priority. People cancel, they back out at the last minute.

### **Caution and Consideration**

At times, well-meaning supportive church folks become overly sympathetic and don't hold people accountable. Racism, discrimination and social injustices are very real and need to be addressed, but short term how do we empower the individual to muster all of their strength, agency, initiative and forge forward in spite of these realities?. When Craig didn't receive the job he wanted at Children's Village, he told the group it was because of his criminal background. Joe was so angered he began to take action to 'sue the pants off them.' We learned how important this was early on. If someone enters the program expecting money or things they may not be as motivated as someone who is there to set goals, heal and move on to create a new future.

One congregant offered computers from her office to each participant. They were desktops that were going to be discarded. As we arranged for this (scheduled to take place after the program ended) Sean arranged that the desktops be given to Sing Sing and the laptops that were being donated to him at Hudson Link could go to our participants. Since many of the recipients were in homeless shelters, it would be more practical for them to have a laptop. Somehow a mentor told the participants about the laptops, and then the donation fell through. It was a terrible experience for everyone. Participants felt

that we'd promised them something and didn't follow through. We had worked so hard to create trust and this was damaging for people who had a lifetime of learning not to trust. I actually had to show them the contracts they signed in the beginning that no exchange of money or gifts would happen during the program (other than the agreed upon stipend and transportation costs) and remind that we didn't promise laptops. My attempts to explain that the donation fell through were not accepted. Some of the volunteers working on the program felt that there was an angry 'entitlement' attitude among participants. Others felt that we should come up with the funding to purchase laptops. I made the decision not to do this because it's important that we are not seen as a wealthy church giving out resources if we want this to be meaningful for both mentors and participants. This would reinforce negative stereotypes if people come to the program just because they can get a laptop.

It is very important to repeatedly connect the volunteers to an awareness that they are living out their faith. This is done at every opportunity in interactions with the mentee and infused throughout the mentor trainings. Many social work principles teach the same things that are in the Bible, just using different language. It would be helpful to offer capacity building for partner organizations that are often overworked and overwhelmed themselves. We need to be building relationships with different institutions as referral sources and to help with the screening process.

## **Part 2**

### **E. Products that resulted from the social justice initiative**

The most exciting outcome of the prison ministry is a systemic change project that we are spearheading in Yonkers, Opening Doors Yonkers. The name was inspired by Alfonso Wyatt's sermon on Empowerment Sunday. The idea came, as we learned about the 'cradle to prison pipeline' and explored the possibility of collaborating with leaders from one of these neighborhoods to work for prevention, rather than only when people return from prison. We could also target all of our mission efforts to one of these communities, something some council members had spoken about before our many projects were diluted by the expansive pool of recipients. We learned through research done at Columbia University of 'million dollar blocks' which spent huge sums of money on ineffective services for people in need. Two of the zip codes touched Bronxville. Our Mission Council researched both before targeting the Nodine Hill section of Yonkers to develop an asset based community development project.

This pilot is just being launched in Nodine Hill, one small section of Yonkers that is notoriously poor and has been described as the type of place where people live temporarily because they have to. To me, this is a shining example of people at RCB committed to living their faith. Although it is a challenge and a big commitment, a handful of leaders have wholeheartedly forged forward with the effort. I'm so grateful to be part of this! This project has many moving parts and I believe we are receiving a great deal of education in the process.

We began the Yonkers Initiative with two important components:

1. The use of graduates from our prison ministry to recruit and mentor some of the street leaders;

2. Formation of friendship teams—led by congregants—around leaders who work on the ground there, starting with Richard Nightingale, Director of Community Services at Westhab; Ray Reid, Community Youth Center; and The Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church’s Pastor Ezequiel Herrera.

Eventually we will expand our friendship teams to include the schools, police department, elected officials and other community groups. The friendship teams will meet monthly with leaders on the ground in Nodine Hill. They will listen to a list of requests from the leaders and then go back to the congregation to meet the requests based on connections and resources just like what was done for Glen and me. They listened, believed deeply in each of us to use the resources responsibly, and provided us with opportunity that we could not have access to on our own, no matter how hard we tried.

To date, our Yonkers Opening Doors project has accomplished a number of incredible programs, with many in the works. At Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church this includes the implementation of successful GED and ESL programs, an improved after school program, a weekly hip hop dance class, pastoral care seminars which aim to support leadership from within the congregation enable neighbor-to-neighbor ministry, and a summer camp, for which Good Shepherd partnered with the local YMCA. The camp was special, not just because it allowed children to enjoy their summers, but because local organizations organically came together for a common cause—to help the children of Nodine Hill have a safe and fun place to play. In addition to all of the amazing work being done at Good Shepherd, an after school program has been put in

place in the community room of a local apartment building where monthly community organizing meetings have also been taking place. There have been community clean up days, the Naviance college prep computer program was installed at P.S. 23, the local, public elementary and middle school in Nodine Hill, and a group of Bronxville high school students recently started a 12-week volunteer tutoring program at Westhab, a local housing and youth organization. The spirit of the project has been contagious in The Reformed Church. The Nursery School and Church School have also participated in various projects and provided gifts, books, and other items for the families in Yonkers. Opening Doors has been a vehicle of unification, inspiration, and kindness.

Richard is now spearheading a project and has raised a good sum of money from investors hoping to begin a construction business that employs the returning citizens in refurbishing distressed properties and then gives them a percentage of the sales.

Jim, former mentor, is hoping to work on a similar social enterprise, a bakery called Our Daily Bread which has enlisted the support of some high end chefs that he works with on other projects.

Teri was inspired by the documentary and has been volunteering as an award winning coach to teach goal setting to program participants and work supporting mentors.

My ex-husband, Timothy said he would consider hiring formerly incarcerated people in his pizzeria. His boyfriend Steven is attending our current series working with a participant who is interested in beginning a fashion blog. He reports a meaningful experience on his blog.

## **RCB and Trauma Informed Care**

In order to make sure participants felt safe we needed to learn how to create a trauma informed community. Although some of it came naturally, from years of experience, we also learned more. If there is chaos or fear of violence or high anxiety, people cannot learn or feel. That they can build new relationships other than with those who violate them is a wonder. Psycho-education was provided so that staff, volunteers and participants could understand what their triggers are. Triggers make you vulnerable. The understanding that “what happened to you is not what is wrong with you, it’s what happened to you” can be healing. Your own defense mechanisms go into play when you are triggered by an event that reminds you of a previous trauma. This is a healthy mechanism innately designed to protect you and keep you safe. But when the current circumstances are that you’re safe now, yet you are still reacting, the awareness of what is happening is important so that you can respond differently. An example we were given at Fordham training sessions, was that if you’re in a group and you hear a gunshot, you may not be present for half an hour after the gunshot sound because it triggers a past event. In a classroom if people are arguing in the hallway and it sounds reminiscent of the arguing that used to take place before parents’ fights escalated to violence, it could trigger a person and they are not able to learn, they check out, zone out. It’s important to help individuals identify what they have control over.

Basic assumptions and capacity to trust has been destroyed for most participants. For CH to be trauma informed, both staff and participants must understand that unconscious protective mechanisms are important considerations. The phrase often used is “Name it to tame it.” It is empowering to understand that responses can be controlled.

You don't need to wake up at 1am every day with worry. Our congregants were willing to learn this and we set up the program with this in mind. We try to offer choices to participants when possible and empower people to do what they can for themselves. Group participants actually run the meetings and rotate the leadership positions as facilitator, reflection leader, clean up coordinator and evaluation leader. We are all learning so much and growing together. This is transformation!

Other churches have seen value in this program and as I write I've been collaborating with a few churches to put similar programs into their congregations. We are working on mentor manuals with Beck Institute for Religion and Poverty to use evidence based research to inform practices for those who would like to replicate the program elsewhere.

## **The Church and The Policy Process**

*"Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial 'outside agitator' idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds."*

*Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 16th, 1963*

We hosted a Public Policy Forum and a panel discussion with elected officials, DOCS Commissioner Brian Fischer, moderated by Glen Martin from Fortune Society. A result was a trip to Albany to lobby with Corrections Association for parole reform, reinstating work release, and prison closures. Although 30 church folks signed up, only 3 of us from RCB were still planning to attend until the night before when a power outage in Bronxville had the remaining two volunteers back out. I went with a few of our program participants and was so impressed. Not only did they quickly educate themselves on the issues in order to speak to elected officials, it was clear that representatives were very interested to hear from returning citizens. It was very empowering for the men to participate in the political process and I was really moved by what happened that day in Albany. Confidence was built stronger in our team after each legislative visit. By the time we left, I thought Derek could run for office himself!

Organizing policy discussion ignited some opposition within the congregation, which at the time may have seemed larger than it actually was. It was actually just three concerned congregants. The fact that they are steeped in the history of the church leadership, as well as large donors, made it very important to respond to their concerns satisfactorily.

The objection was to political involvement from church. We were able to proceed but not before oppositional emails were circulated and I was asked to meet with the head



of Consistory. It is important for people wanting to start a program who aren't already doing advocacy work to do some education and be prepared. Establish the biblical mandate to address the root causes of poverty and injustice. Sometimes to be faithful it requires being political. Tax exempt status of churches could be jeopardized if you take a stance for a politician rather than an issue.

Fortunately some of the preparation the church had done included a “Vote Our Poverty” campaign. Hundreds of congregants signed pledges to ask politicians to keep poverty on the political agenda during the elections. Also we had participated in the Overnight vigil and breakfast with elected officials at City Hall Park with an agenda to end homelessness in NYC.

The opposition to the public policy discussions was the same three folks who had troubled mentoring relationships. In hindsight, I could have prepared these folks better, eliminating much angst for all of us, but was unable to do so because I was also learning.

## **Part 2**

**F Conclusion:** This ministry has attracted a record number of volunteers. This fact is encouraging even to the church members who aren’t involved. There has been a great deal of support from mission council and staff.

Large events with low commitment levels such as CH Graduation ceremonies, the play *The Castle*, and Empowerment Sunday Worship service, are good and highly effective at informing the larger community about issues surrounding incarceration. The large events that attract masses also compliment the smaller more deeply committed group of individuals working in prison ministry. I believe that both inform and inspire the

other. It only requires a handful of enthusiastic committed congregants to make the program hugely successful and to be a source of hope and faith for change in the world.

Record numbers of church folks became involved this year. We offered many education opportunities, with various entry points into ministry, mostly bite-sized to fit busy schedules and observe interactions to see if this ministry was a fit and where people's gifts lied. The mentors were handpicked and asked to volunteer. Even congregants who haven't volunteered or shown great interest in attending the program are proud that the church is doing this

### **More encouraging Feedback**

*Thank you for all the love you have given me and the group Thomas*

*I want to thank you for the assistance you have given me and the men thus far. You are truly an angel. Thank you for allowing the men and I to access the clothing room. There were items that were useful as well as appropriate for the season. You guys at the Reformed Church are really exposing your kindness and your willingness to reach into our lives and plant a seed of love in the soil of our hearts. Tom*

*Hey Dawn - I think many of the people who belong to the Reformed Church felt like the Coming Home program allowed them to become more connected with the Reformed Church themselves. Opening the church to new friends through this program gave them a sense of belonging there as well, and showed them the capabilities of the church congregants when they work and think together for others. Some of the mentors didn't know what they had to offer until going through this program and being forced to draw on their skill set.*

*Best,  
Emily*

## CHAPTER 7 TRANSFORMATION

### *Stoddard Platt*

*When a simple parole violation landed one of our Coming Home participants in jail, Stoddard sprang into action like a superhero. I watched in amazement as he oozed charm and managed to open every closed door in the court system. He seemed to befriend and charm every possible power player throughout the process—from the person at the security desk to the judge. He was relentless. Stoddard organized letter writing and stood fast as he managed a church presence at all of the hearings. Craig and his family were so overwhelmed with gratitude. They started attending our worship services in response to an invitation from Stoddard. Craig told me in disbelief, “this guy is so humble, he doesn’t want anything in return.”*

*That’s my kind of evangelism. As Saint Frances said, “Go out and preach the Gospel, and if you must, use words.” Let us give thanks to Stoddard Platt, our 2009 faithful Christian superhero.*

*- Dawn honoring Stoddard at Consistory Gathering Bronxville Field Club may 2010*

*For the Coming Home participants, he did what he has done since he began practicing law in 1964, giving legal advice and helping people solve problems. He built his practice around the notion that reconciling disputes is better than fighting them out. And he gave pro bono legal services to Coming Home in the same common-sense way.*

*He did other ordinary things in extraordinary ways, making dinner for Coming Home folks, hosting barbeques, speaking up for men and women who weren’t used to Yale Law graduates going to bat for them. We saw the many ways he gave of himself, it brought out the best in him, and we saluted him at a Consistory gathering. We let the whole church community know how he had become a kind of ‘superhero.’*

*But even heroes like Stoddard Platt come up against forces they can’t overcome. He had a stroke, and it led to an extended hospital stay. Two Coming Home graduates heard about Stoddard’s situation, and came to a meeting ready to launch a ‘Free Stoddard’ campaign. They knew about captivity, and they said they were ready to ‘liberate him’ from the hospital, even if they had to toss him in their trunk.*

*He was liberated, eventually, by his daughter, who moved him into an assisted living facility. Stoddard came back to church and told us about the hospital visits, the phone calls, the expressions of care and concern from Coming Home alumni. And as he told these stories, he cried - something real heroes are never afraid to do.*

## **Transformation as a Shared Experience**

I want to begin this chapter with a perspective on how we have changed, how the Church and the entire RCB community has grown in faith through the Coming Home program. Transformation happens when hearts are open, when there is a willingness to consider change, and when there are actions we take together that redefine our views and prepare us for challenges. I think these forces are at work at RCB, and even though there is much to be done, there is an arc of progress in what we have accomplished together.

Community transformation depends on several things: how information is organized, belief systems and values, a respect for each other's views and experiences as a pool of common knowledge, and, of course, it depends on the aggregate of individual decisions and actions. Being in relationship, and listening to the experiences of other people, particularly people from dramatically different backgrounds and circumstances, is one of the real measures of our transformation. The RCB community and the Coming Home program have learned so much by entering into a relationship with participants. Following are just a few examples of the beginning of this process within our congregation.

- Early on, Jean, a Coming Home participant told our group a story of throwing herself against a building and crying before she came to the program. She thought everyone had gone mad while she was away. Everyone was walking down the street talking to themselves. She wasn't yet aware of the modern wireless technology called Bluetooth.
- Jean also told us of her struggles with depression and suicidal thoughts. She attributed some of her dark feelings to the sad state of her apartment—a living space which never felt welcoming and which she was not proud of. Upon hearing of this, Cathy, a Coming Home mentor

spontaneously offered and organized a Habitat For Humanity team to go to Brooklyn to clean, paint, repair and patch, improve lighting and make Jean's living space a home. The results: Jean's spirits and outlook improved immediately and significantly, and our hearts were all full from the joy of the experience.

- One member, carries a subway token in his wallet, to remind him of the different world a person returns to after years of incarceration, not knowing how to manage the seemingly simple tasks to function in the world.
- Michael told us a story of having watched the traffic across the river from Sing Sing, emphasizing that he would *never* complain about traffic. He is so happy to be in traffic. The many small anecdotes like this one made lasting impressions on me and on all of the congregants in attendance, and our perspectives on life—both on the “inside” and on the “outside”—have been changed forever.

### **Our New Responsibilities**

As a community, we learn and accept new responsibilities. We are learning that to be responsible we need to become more acutely aware of the trauma suffered by so many, especially those coming from poverty, and certainly all returning citizens. We are learning that the emotional damage done to a person who grows up in an unsafe environment, especially one who witnesses or experiences violence leaves wounds which can carry behavioral residuals with them. These often manifest themselves as anti-social responses in conflict, such as lashing out, or being retributive. Our new challenge is to find ways toward healing and for handling life's inevitable conflicts. We are learning about patience and second chances.

## **Building Blocks**

Dr. Lundy told our class not to try to build a cathedral, but to begin with a brick. This was a challenge for me but I see the vision of a cathedral as our congregants are brimming in social enterprise ideas: Jim Wickline wants to open a bakery as a training institute; Richard Pink wants to begin a worker-owned construction business; and Sam is talking about racism studies at our congregation.

In response to what we have learned about neighborhoods that serve as ‘pipelines to prison’ RCB congregants initiated our Opening Doors project. This ambitious plan will pro-actively lift one small section of Yonkers, New York out of the cycle of poverty rather than simply waiting to begin the healing process *after* incarceration. Opening Doors is a shining example of transformation at RCB, where people who are committed and won’t walk away, act upon their new understanding by applying their gifts and talents to make real change for the future. Slowly, and not without problems and false moves, the community is evolving.

I can report that the RCB community, and particularly the Coming Home family, is moving from something very much like stasis to a dynamic engagement with what is possible. We have come from the early days of struggling to listen with care and interest, of thinking we could ‘fix it,’ to countless examples of direct personal engagement with the lives of formerly incarcerated men and women, to exploring how we might use our own gifts to improve life’s odds for those with poverty and injustice in their way. Of course there are miles to go, and of course we will continue to struggle with our priorities and personalities and human limitations. But I think the genie is out of the lamp and

cannot be put back. When transformation happens, it's there. We may, in fact, get what we wish for.

### **Personal and Professional Growth**

As for me, I've always wanted to build a cathedral. One of my favorite quotes is *"I want to be thoroughly used up when I die,"* from Bertrand Russell. Yes, I'd like to change the world. But I do get frustrated, angry with people in power, people from privilege, the empire that will exploit others for greedy self-interest, and also the criminal justice system. It has become so clear to me that I am part of that system and that I need to choose whether to focus on the great parts of it while I work for change, or to be angry and add to the angry energy in the world that creates such a retributive system. I am choosing to try and extend the same forgiveness and belief in myself and the system that I do for others.

As I focus on this ministry, the record numbers of RCB volunteers who have engaged, and the handful who remain strongly committed, I am sure that things are in alignment, and I am inspired. I know I'm doing my best, and that there's a place inside me that knows what we are doing is good and right.

### **When I Began**

I came to RCB after many years of organizing faith communities to take action for social justice. My job immediately prior to RCB, though, had me believing that I might need to leave church life. I probably would have been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (the result of working with a pastor whose behavior exemplified everything I resist and reject in church life). I feared the RCB assignment could be more of the same. But I really liked the hiring committee, as well as my findings as I

researched the pastor, but honestly I needed to be practical and earn a paycheck while I discerned what was next. As it turns out, this position has offered me a chance to make an important contribution based on those many years of experience, so I am deeply grateful that I responded to the call.

Twenty years ago I went to a correctional facility for the first time. It was in Nassau County with St. Vincent de Paul, and our mission was Christmas card delivery. Each person received two blank stamped Christmas cards to send to someone. I was to distribute in the women's facility where I was told that in order to get more cards, the women would sometimes hide theirs and say they hadn't received any. For that reason I needed to go to each cell and place two cards on each cot within the cell. The women walked freely within this area, and the two-tiered construction was such that I could easily be cornered and harassed while the guards watched on closed-circuit TV from outside the locked gate. I got the impression from two different guards that they weren't happy about our gift to the inmates and that they didn't feel the women deserved any treats. I also feared that if I did run into trouble the guards just might find it entertaining to watch me squirm before deciding to come to my aid. My anxiety level was so high that I couldn't be the loving person I wanted to be. I felt like I was flinging Christmas cards at people, sometimes practically hitting them in the teeth or eyeball with a card. I decided this wasn't the ministry for me.

Fast forward 20 years, and soon after meeting the first group of participants of Coming Home I am changed. I want to learn to teach just so I can go on the inside and share anything I know, especially that I believe in the gifts of the individuals there and



want them to learn, grow, and use the rest of their precious lives to look forward and make their unique contributions to the world.

Dawn's personal journal entry 10-23-09:

*Last night Evan shared his story at Coming Home. I cried an ocean before falling asleep and woke up today with a headache. I wish I could go back in time and put little Evan on my lap and tell him how special and beautiful he is. I wish I could give him the love and attention he so deserved. I wish I could be there to play with him when the other kids wouldn't and explain their ignorance and help him understand his Mom's illness. I wish I could offer him other opportunities and show him how special and extraordinary he was to get so motivated to make money and save for his first gun. He showed the tremendous strength and determination within himself; had he grown up in a different neighborhood, he would have been saving for a bicycle, or a game, or maybe even to help others...how proud I am of him that he set his mind to a goal and was successful...what initiative at such a young age and help him to use those skills to move toward a different goal. I can't go back and change things for little Evan. But maybe we can change things for the 'little Evans' out there now who need love, opportunity, acceptance, supportive community - not gangs. I want so much to make change. The daily meditation for today is about the virtue of patience. I'm praying for patience but I'm holy angry and want to do something for change now.*

*Glen and I began taking classes to become foster parents, not sure whether it is right for us, but exploring. We learned many things about new approaches toward the support of hurting families.*

At the time when I began the Coming Home project I knew almost nothing about prison issues, and I was being overwhelmed with questions and anxieties from congregants. Something I hadn't anticipated, I needed to give as much (or more) attention and care to the congregants as I did to participants. I also felt concerned that I would need to take careful steps to keep the RCB community happy for fear of repercussions from congregants in the governing body of the church. To quell my concerns I needed to reduce my own anxiety, and I decided to do this by building spiritual strength and a closer relationship with God. I participated in a Buddhist retreat, a Landmark forum, began an exercise routine to an iPod full of "positive message music," committed to a contemplative prayer practice, and began spiritual direction. Finally, a few of these things fell to the wayside as I learned the most valuable lesson: to find the right balance for me. Ironically, when I take more time to pray, do self-care, and walk to work I discover a better attitude and find more energy with which to manage the many things that come my

way. I found renewed strength to go forward and work hard from a centered place—more than I ever found in compulsive work effort or the craziness of the mainstream.

I realized that I would have to encourage the congregants to consider and appreciate the issues, addressing the symptoms and circumstances as well as the root causes of problems, and respond as our Christian faith demands. Along with Mission council, goals were set for the RCB community: understanding the issues of incarceration, and understanding systemic issues such as poverty and racism. I wanted to encourage involvement through the forging of personal relationships, hands-on mentoring, advocacy and other volunteer opportunities to connect gifts and skills of congregants with the needs of program participants.

### **What Has Happened Along the Way**

A measure of my growth, change and efficacy is the aggregate of individual events, personal journeys and stories which have impacted me greatly. Mainly the incredible strengths, faith and gifts of formerly incarcerated people whom I have met along the way: When I started school at NYTS I had some issues and challenges with the RCB Coming home prison ministry.

As an extraordinary act of support Dr. Dale Irvin, sent out an email and next thing I knew, he had built me a ‘think tank.’ It was hosted by Julio Medina at Exodus Transitional Community, and was designed to offer support for the RCB Coming Home ministry program. This extraordinary cast of giants included Eric Waters, John Conyers, Julio and several others, each of whom had received an academic degree while inside Sing Sing. Each was a strong leader engaged in life-changing work helping others. With

generous hearts, wisdom and knowledge they gave me remarkable input to improve our program.

**Tom Ryer** was a participant in our Coming Home program. We welcomed him a couple of weeks late because he had just been released. Having missed the earlier presentation of the ground rules he left session to take a phone call in the attached kitchenette. Moments later he emerged beaming with excitement to share that he had just landed a job! It has been like that for Tom since he came home. He is working hard and good things are coming his way. He writes me notes of gratitude on a regular basis. He inspires me. He once showed up for an overnight vigil to end homelessness. He is always understanding when I haven't been able to attend some significant events he has hosted, maintaining a positive attitude and always seeing the good in things. When I encouraged him to apply for a grant at our church and he wasn't awarded it, I called to apologize and he was grateful that I had even thought of him. The grant was for transitional housing and services for returning citizens. He was recently married to a lovely woman and continues his good work.

**Tina Reynolds** came to one of the 'Gentle Revolution' gatherings I'd been hosting in my home. She was a guest of Eric Waters at my 'Gentle Revolution,' an informal gathering of friends and like-minded people. I soon discovered that Tina had worked to change a piece of New York legislation which had permitted the shackling of incarcerated women while they gave birth. It was a significant victory after continuous efforts which included a demonstration of pregnant women being shackled outside city hall. She has started a nonprofit, 'WORTH - Women on The Rise Telling Her Story,' and continues to work to change demeaning legislation in NY and other states. This year,

2012/2013 we partnered with her in our program and all of our Coming Home participants were women referred through her organization.

When I met with the leaders of the **Boy Scouts** with my menu of opportunity about possible community service projects, the prison ministry was practically dismissed as not possible. I urged them to take a closer look, because we really could use the Scouts to cook a meal. It took a lot of urging. What happened was incredible. The Scouts each introduced themselves and shared a little. The men in the program shared a little. The dialogue was powerful and we came to a discussion about how wonderful the scouting opportunity is. It would have been life changing if some of the men in the program had been given the opportunity to be in the Scouts when they were young. Perhaps it would have taught skills and opened doors for other life paths. The Scouts decided they wanted to continue serving these men.

### **I Believe in You**

Belief in individuals is essential to my own growth, my faith and the success of the Coming Home program. It is often tested, and outcomes are never certain:

*Lou graduated from our second series. I hadn't seen him in a while. He heard that I was running a systemic change project in Yonkers, and knowing that it was a rough neighborhood he offered to volunteer and 'have my back' (very meaningful for me!). He showed up one day, all beaten up with a scar across his face. He had been robbed while he was in his apartment in Yonkers. He'd lost everything, all the computer equipment he had been using for his new businesses of t-shirt design and videography. Last I heard he planned to make his way south to seek a better, safer and more prosperous future.*

*I decided to check in; in case he was still around I wanted to alert him to a videography job opportunity at Fordham University, but getting back in touch proved difficult. I put out feelers everywhere: Facebook, email, phone calls, but*

*no one had heard from him. Finally, I heard back through Facebook. Yes, he was absolutely interested in the job possibility. I connected him to the folks at the University and they hired him to videotape various graduations for several programs similar to Coming Home. They were thrilled with his first effort and looked forward to working with him on nine more.*

*He had expected payment when the first graduation was done, not knowing to submit an invoice to the University as Fordham required. The college, wanting to support Lou, managed a plan to pay him in cash.*

*It soon became clear, from six voicemails he'd left, that Lou desired to complete the next job but his anxiety surrounding transportation and other details led to a no-show. Fordham staff was concerned, of course, and Lou's calls the next day demanding payment quickly escalated to the point that the coordinator's husband began to worry for her safety. They called me seeking gentle intervention, really wanting to work it out and help Lou continue. I again reached out to him with carefully chosen words: "Lou I heard from Fordham that they loved the work you did for them and are looking forward to more work together. I understand there was some confusion around the payment so if you'd like me to help iron that out in any way please let me know and I will. Otherwise I trust that you and Elaine will work it out. Congratulations on your great work."*

*After this message, he connected with Elaine.*

My point: this work requires some tricky negotiation, always rooted in love and faith until trust ultimately smooths everything out. Lou was concerned about receiving payment because he has learned not to trust, and he also has learned to use bullying tactics to get what he needs. He hadn't yet been in a pro-social environment to learn another way. Many folks in the ordinary business world are too busy to understand and provide the care and support required for this learning process. I need to believe that some folks in the mainstream will undertake this work and recognize that it is all of our responsibility.

There are others, like Carolyn who chose to hire a graduate and had to use a great deal of time and energy to make it a successful experience for all. In one of the focus groups she shared the intensity of the experience of working with Juan, but that she felt it was God's work.

How do we get more congregants to do this? How do we encourage critical thinking around poverty and faith issues? How do I move the congregation from expecting me to do a PowerPoint presentation to them being part of a think-tank? We aren't using everything we know about poverty, and there *are* places where abject poverty *has* changed. This is a part of the reality I want to create at RCB. I've realized that community transformation depends on several things: how information is organized, our belief systems and values (e.g., Does every child deserve a non-violent environment in which to grow? Do we have an obligation to address poverty?). This transformative process also depends on personal, individual decisions and actions.

Here's another example of a change in me brought about by my engagement in this work:

*Recently I was involved in a small car accident. I pulled out of a grocery store parking lot, scraped the fender of a woman stopped at the traffic light. Before I was even clear about what had happened, the other driver was screaming at me asking what was wrong with me. My initial response was calm. I asked her to move her car to a safe spot to discuss the matter. She was very angry, anxious and yelling. I decided we should call the police because she was completely overreacting to the incident and greatly exaggerating the damage which appeared to be a minor scrape. When the policeman arrived on the scene she was accusing me of trying to flee, claiming that when I hit her it moved the car, inferring that it hurt her baby. At first I could manage the untruths but quickly my anxiety and anger began to escalate as I saw someone who was going to try to get money from this unfortunate but minor bump. We were yelling at each other when the cop told us each to go to our cars. Sitting in the car trying to regroup, my sweet husband*

*showed up with a warm coat for me and kind words. He helped put the episode in perspective, unlike the catastrophe the upset woman was painting. I began to feel ashamed of my angry outburst and to remember the transformative justice model I've been trying to incorporate into my work. I was able to re-group and listen to the young woman with understanding. I heard her story about her angry husband who was going to scream at her. He just bought the car, they don't have a lot of money and have three children. She had been driving around in a jalopy until they saved enough money for the shiny new SUV. She told me how her husband loved cars and what a bad temper he had. I offered to call him myself and say I was sorry, and that I would pay for repairs. It moved to a different place because of my transformative justice mindset.*

As I expose myself to the concepts and practices of transformative justice, I understand that much of this must be cultivated in our own lives and community. I want to be part of creating this.

There has been a gradual recognition of limits, boundaries, constraints and cautions, for myself and for the entire RCB Coming Home program.

*I had lost touch with Thomas, but when we were planning to help Jean by cleaning and painting her apartment I thought to call him for support. Jean lived in a really rough neighborhood and she thought we would need a local person present. I wanted to get it done while she was at work, however, so I did a push to mobilize quickly. Thinking that as long as we brought one 'street smart' person along we would be fine, I thought to call Thomas, but in the interim I'd been warned not to reach out to him. He had told people that he "has no use for us at RCB." When I heard this I felt terrible and wanted to reach out to him. I was warned to expect an attitude, but I left a voicemail and a Facebook post and Thomas called me back right away. Although I was prepared to take my lumps, I knew I had to reach out anyway. Thomas told me that he had asked for a character reference from his Coming Home mentor when he got locked up on a parole violation. The mentor never got back to him. He didn't hear from any of us*

*at RCB for the next year while he was locked up, or even the year after that when he'd had open heart surgery. I explained how sorry I was and that I felt responsible.*

*It was in that moment that I realized this was one of a series of events in which I was struggling with too many moving parts and needed to pull in the reins with church volunteers. First was Stoddard's big movement to keep Craig out of jail. Then was a series of challenges that resulted in the church using 'deacons funds' to bail out Anna after she was locked up for credit card theft for purchasing a new mattress on her boss's credit card. It was clear things were getting out of hand, and although the generous church folks were being open and kind, the stage was set for us to take a turn down the wrong road. If we were to distribute funds I wanted them to go through a "board" which included some CH alumni in the decision making. It was a new program at risk of spinning out of control and I didn't want it to be discontinued.*

*Thomas listened to my explanation of the complicated decisions I'd made to bring things around and the miscommunications which had led to misunderstandings and the apparent evaporation of his RCB support system. Thomas was kind, understanding and forgiving. I felt a weight off my shoulders and an expanded heart. Thomas explained that he'd thought we were judging him for getting locked up again and therefore not contacting him. I explained that no one had judged him and that everyone has always been rooting for his success. He wants to come to the reunion gathering.*

Finally, I want to highlight one of the seminal experiences that has fueled my growth, and give thanks for the opportunity:

At the Omega Women and Power conference, I gathered with women from every imaginable sector of society, from artists to activists, poets to politicians, and mothers to moguls. On stage and in the audience were women exploring how to live and lead with a



new kind of consciousness, one that is inclusive, innovative, heart centered, and courageous.

The conference opened with a message from Elizabeth Lesser that I needed to hear! She told a story about Eve Ensler and her courageous work to stop violence against women. She asked Eve how she can be unafraid in the face of presidents and international leaders...where does she draw the strength to speak truth to power? Eve said because they're all just making things up. We should never compare ourselves to others because we are all equal.

Elizabeth said what the world needs is more energized, engaged people using their authentic voice to make the world a better place. This was so empowering for me. I'm not the most scholarly and certainly I can identify with many of the members of our prison ministry that have a history that they would like to put behind them. I lack confidence often, but the one thing I am confident about is my ability to be an engaged person doing my best to make the world a better place.

In the last decade Omega joined a global conversation about how we can use power differently. How can we open new paths and opportunities not just for women but for everybody? What's possible when we try not only to gain equitable power, but also to change the very nature of power? How can the unique wisdom of women be brought to bear on the most pressing issues of our time?

Hundreds of empirical studies show that long exclusion from traditional power structures taught women a new way to lead. Women are collaborative, admit to not knowing things, and use empathy to seek wiser solutions to conflict. The world needs

conversation and emotionally intelligent communication. Talking may be the human behavior that saves the world, they say.

*agape: ancient greek word - an intentional response to ill-being through promoting well-being. Leadership research shows those with strong Agape muscles lead the world.*

One of the speakers was Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, Ph.D. She is a senior research professor on trauma, forgiveness and reconciliation at the University of Free State in Bloemfontein, South Africa. She served as coordinator of victims' public testimonies on South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), and has been involved in studying the process of forgiving in order to deepen the understanding of its reparative elements in the aftermath of human-rights violations and mass trauma. She spoke about empathic repair. Archbishop Desmond Tutu would stop the TRC whenever forgiveness would happen. He would ask for a moment of silence to recognize that we are on holy ground. Listening to the TRC she realized that forgiveness was possible with empathy.

Loung Ung, another speaker, was the survivor of the killing fields of Cambodia, one of the bloodiest episodes of the 20th century. She works now to promote equality, human rights, and justice in her native land and worldwide. She talked about changing your language and how you look at the experience. She used to say that she was "lucky to escape" a rape as an 11 year old girl and now she realizes that she fought her way out of rape. Her message: Transform narrative into one of a fighter or survivor. Change the perception of who you are. Tell a new story for your life. This is what happened. It's not who you are. You have to choose to take action and do it. Re-write a life that was yours to begin with. Reclaim your life. It's yours. You have the power to take action. Make

your story one of strength and power and wholeness. The narrative component of Coming Home has been tweaked to do just this.

***The power to recreate is in you. You came into the world with it. You are the only one who can use it or it will leave the world without you using it.***

I've since plastered the walls of the room where Coming Home meets with these positive empowering messages. Sally Field, Marjora Carter and a procession of other great women shared their stories and their hardships. Each one talked about how they felt 'not good enough' and had 'imposter syndrome,' clearly impressing upon us in the audience that we all have something to offer and need to own our own power.

I would like to be a stronger voice at the table, staking my claim as a player committed to the betterment of others on a large scale. Although I'm aware that I have much to overcome and learn in order to strengthen this voice, I have faith and determination. My hope is to complete the DMin process and embark on the pilgrimage El Camino De Santiago as just a few of the many steps along the journey of a discernment process.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
**Demonstration Project Proposal**

“COMING HOME” PRISON MINISTRY

By

DAWN RAVELLA

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

Submitted to

New York Theological Seminary  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Tuckahoe, New York, USA

January 21, 2012

**Challenge Statement**

The Reformed Church of Bronxville, in Southern Westchester, where I serve as Director of Mission has entered into prison ministry and revitalized the church community with meaningful opportunity for congregants to live their faith. Graduates of the program report great benefits, however they continue to face challenges securing affordable housing, employment with a living wage, healthcare, and other essentials necessary for a life of dignity. This project will create a documentary used as an educational tool to help the congregation be more effective in prison ministry.

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## **CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING**

### **THE REFORMED CHURCH OF BRONXVILLE**

If we are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.<sup>1</sup>  
-Sydney Harris-

#### **Reflection Upon Ministry**

The Reformed Church of Bronxville is a progressive, suburban congregation comprised of many highly-educated, professional, high-achieving, powerful, financially savvy, committed, faithful people. The commitment to church and helping others is considered a priority.

My dream is to harness that commitment and energy to deepen our faith commitment to help others—looking beyond charity to the root causes of problems—in order to become leaders working for change in the world. This would require a paradigm shift from a traditional charity and service oriented community.

Although this congregation is generous and already doing many great things, I believe we can do more with greater impact. Because the church is made up of many movers and shakers, transformation, when it occurs here, is bound have a greater impact in the world. I hope that as congregants begin to form relationships with people who are living in poverty, they will begin to understand some of the deeper complex issues, the need for systemic change, and how each of us is an important part of that process. My

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<sup>1</sup> “Sydney Harris.” Quotes.net. <http://www.quotes.net/quote/7878> (accessed January 11, 2012).



dream is that congregants will immerse themselves in faithful and intellectual heart-centered study of the causes of poverty and the need for each of us to make all decisions in life through the lens of our faith. This includes economic, political, parenting and social decisions. Once this occurs, we will be moved to action in a different way.

My project will begin with one small component of allowing people to become involved in a community of folks different from Bronxville residents. Two years ago, we began a pilot prison ministry. The project is an 18-week program for people being released from prison. Congregants have the opportunity to get involved in many ways, from cooking and serving a meal to teaching classes: mentoring, looking at policy issues such as parole reform, prison closures and education in prison, as well as examining neighborhoods called the “Pipeline to Prison” or “million dollar blocks.” The program has generated so much interest and enthusiasm within the community that I had to expand the program components to absorb the number of congregants interested in volunteering.

A beautiful outcome of this expansion has been a weekly community meal with program participants and congregants dining together. People are reporting being transformed by the experience. Participants have expressed feeling welcomed and not judged. Congregants who are mentoring are recognizing their desire to do more, to be more helpful, and the feeling of inadequacy about how to proceed. There’s an opportunity to seize the enthusiasm and offer a lot of education regarding poverty, racism, trauma, forgiveness, and our punitive criminal justice system. This is a stepping stone in the learning process that calls people of faith away from a ‘charity’ mindset and moves them toward an understanding of our need to take a lead role in creating systemic change and a society that is moving toward forgiveness and responsibly building a more

just society. One challenge is that although the congregants are interested in learning more, their schedules are extremely tight and it is difficult to find time for training.

### **Reflection Upon Mission**

The vision of The Reformed Church of Bronxville is to create a community of extraordinary love and service by:

- Loving God with all our hearts;
- Accepting all people;
- Caring for all people;
- Growing all people;
- Serving all people;
- Providing excellent programs for children and youth.

From the beginning, The Reformed Church has been a church for the community.

Though the congregation is made up of persons from many denominations, RCB is a member of The Reformed Church in America. Reformed Church history can be traced to the Netherlands in the 17th century, to Germany and Switzerland during the Protestant Reformation, and beyond to the church of Jesus Christ in its earliest days.

The Reformed Church of Bronxville is committed to teaching God's word, deepening lives through prayer, worship, learning and teaching. RCB seeks to glorify God, to reach people inside the community and beyond it with the message of the Gospel, to reach out inclusively to each other in Christian love, to train people for ministries to do God's work in the world.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Reformed Church of Bronxville, "The Reformed Church of Bronxville: Who We Are", <http://www.reformedchurch.org/page.php/prmID/471> (accessed August 20, 2011).

### **Reflection Upon Spirituality**

The church is currently open to change and growth under direction of Rev. Dr. Ken Ruge. He and the majority of the current pastoral staff were hired within the last four years, following a period of crisis and transition within RCB. Programs are exploding and new members are becoming engaged. There is a sense of optimism in the air. Behind the scenes, some of the pastoral staff members, including myself, are struggling to find balance and to keep up with the work demands of the congregation. Some will secretly admit to not feeling safe in their job, and feeling the need to keep certain people happy. For me, I feel strongly that my role is to encourage people to live the Gospel message by addressing poverty and injustice. I am aware of the language I use, and have been told not to use the word 'justice'. I am sensitive to the fact that a largely Republican, powerful congregation, can be turned off by messages from Saul Alinsky or others about systemic change. I try to make sure the message I send about power and influence is not a negative one, but rather that power and influence can be used for the greater good.

### **Reflection Upon Identity**

The historic Reformed Church of Bronxville is perched on a hill known as "Four Corners Square" in the one square mile Village of Bronxville. This charming English style village is nestled along the bank of the Bronx River, 15 miles from midtown Manhattan. The stunning architecture, quality school system, hospital, and proximity to NYC make this an attractive place to live. <sup>2</sup>

The Reformed Church of Bronxville proudly proclaims a position as one of the most vital Protestant Churches in the United States with excellence in leadership by its

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<sup>2</sup> The Village of Bronxville "Welcome to the Village of Bronxville," <http://www.villageofbronxville.com/welcome/welcome.htm> (accessed August 20, 2011).

ministers, and by an increasingly involved and committed congregation. The current minister, Rev. Dr. Ken Ruge, is the fifth senior minister in the church's 161 year history. The Reformed Church of Bronxville is one of the largest congregations within The Reformed Church of America, one of the oldest denominations in North America.

The Reformed branch of Protestantism has its roots in the Reformation of the Christian Church in the 1500's. Its primary spiritual leader was John Calvin, of Geneva, Switzerland, whose reform movement spread to Scotland, where it became the Presbyterian Church, and the Netherlands, where it became the Dutch Reformed Church.<sup>3</sup>

RCB is governed by the Consistory, elected elders and deacons along with the clergy they have called. Regional governing bodies are called Classes and Regional Synods. The General Synod gathers once a year to make decisions that affect the entire church.

Although RCB is steeped in tradition, it is more recently open to changes. It has a formal past and until recently ushers wore morning coats to service. The three Sunday worship services are each very different. The early morning service is small, about 50 people; we gather in the choir loft of the sanctuary and the Eucharist is celebrated every Sunday at this service. The 10:30 AM worship is the main service which usually is attended by approximately 250 people. There is a children's sermon during worship and then children are dismissed to Christian Education classes. Children's choirs begin with the cherubs and work their way up to adulthood. Matt Phelps, the current Music Director, takes his place as the fifth Distinguished Organist and Choir Director in the church

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<sup>3</sup> John Cory, A. Wright Elliott, Harry Evans, Jr., Richard Lichti, Charles Little, David McBride, Germaine Safford, Briscoe Smith, Elinor Urstadt, *A Celebration: The Reformed Church of Bronxville 1850-2000* (New York: William A Raymond and Robert Seabring, 2000), 74.

history. The music department has grown to include a Children's Choir Director, Nell MacDonald, another Organist, and a Hand Bell Director. Classical and traditional mainline hymns accompanied by the pipe organ, soloists and many choirs enrich this service which could easily be described as "high church." Music is another great priority for RCB and many resources are directed to provide outstanding music. I had to reschedule "Empowerment Sunday" when Alfonso Wyatt was scheduled to preach because a special worship celebration was already planned on that day for the organ dedication. Eucharist by intinction is celebrated three times throughout the year.

Recently added, *The Gathering* is a very relaxed service offered in a less formal part of the church, the Congregational Hall. It is very different than our traditional service, yet in my opinion, equally appealing (not just because my beautiful husband whom I adore is often the musician). It is casual and interactive. People bring homemade cookies and coffee to their seats. This worship is attracting many new people who are not currently attending worship services. It also seems to attract many Catholics. Contemporary Christian rock and jazz standards are performed by young local musicians. The sermons are practical and geared to non-churched folks who are looking for a meaningful message as opposed to the 10:30 AM worshippers who are often steeped in church history and biblical studies. Lay leaders are included in worship service and recently have begun to lead the Christian Education classes offered between the two early services.

The church is very welcoming and members graciously greet anyone new or unfamiliar. The community lacks diversity, which is a reflection of the town. Recent efforts to grow the church sparked discussions about the congregation's intimidating

formal attire and “high church” style of service. I was part of an amusing conversation when a group of men at coffee hour gathered and laughed at themselves. Each had agreed the previous night to attend worship without a tie to help convey a more relaxed feeling in the congregation. Each came to church in their tie, too uncomfortable to break free from this tradition.

### **Reflection Upon Programs**

RCB has many programs. Regular opportunities within Mission include:

- Midnight Run and Breakfast Run to deliver food and blankets to those living on the streets of Manhattan;
- Westhab Playgroup which offers safe play space and lunch to Moms and children from neighboring Yonkers;
- Habitat for Humanity housing builds;
- Clothing Closet which is not only open to individuals in need, but which also has regular sales, the proceeds of which benefit the Elm Street Neighborhood Youth Center summer programs and Midnight Run;
- Kenya partnership with Cross Cultural Thresholds;
- Fair-trade Holiday Sale featuring the work of artisans from around the world who receive 100% of the proceeds;
- Soup Kitchen provisions which are delivered to a local soup kitchen;
- Coming Home Prison Ministry;
- Film Nights with discussions to follow about social justice issues;

- Many “one time” events, such as The Vote Out Poverty campaign, recycling bicycle campaigns, *Awakening the Dreamer* symposiums and many educational opportunities.

The Reformed Church of Bronxville also continues a strong tradition of opening its doors to local, non-profit community groups and activities, such as Scouts, Brownies, the League of Women Voters, Junior League, Senior Citizens of Bronxville, Bronxville Adult School, AA, and Al-Anon. These are some of the many organizations who use RCB facilities as they continue to enrich our greater Southern Westchester community.<sup>4</sup>

### **Reflection Upon Capacity/Resources**

The Reformed Church has great capacity and numerous resources. It was reported at the last Consistory meeting that the 2011 EMC Campaign (to date) has yielded approximately \$1.5 million in pledges.<sup>5</sup> This EMC pledge is supplemented yearly by an endowment that was established in 1952. The wise investments of the past have now resulted in Property and Maintenance endowment funds and outreach endowment funds that allow for extraordinary facilities and programs.

The building and the Church grounds are impeccably cared for. When I began three years ago, renovations to the back entrance of the church were delayed because the stones needed to come from the same quarry of origin, and the ground was frozen at that particular time of year. This attention to preserving the beauty of the church home is apparent right down to the polished silver and personalized china at coffee hour.

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<sup>4</sup> The Reformed Church of Bronxville, “The Reformed Church of Bronxville: About the Church,” <http://http://www.reformedchurch.org/page.php/prmID/441> (accessed August 20, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> The Reformed Church of Bronxville, “Reformed Church of Bronxville Consistory Minutes,” minutes from the monthly Consistory meeting, Bronxville, New York, February 8, 2011.

The building was designed by the architect Harry Leslie Walker, a member of the church. The architecture echoes an English church of the middle ages with Gothic aspects and a large tower. There is a courtyard and notable stained glass windows.

The well-known stained glass artist, Charles J. Connick of Boston designed and oversaw the installation of The Reformed Church's windows in the years between 1944 and 1945. The windows are designed to tell various stories from the Bible: incidents of the Old Testament, and incidents in the life of Christ. A large gallery window over the main entrance of the church serves as a World War II memorial window.<sup>6</sup> One of our congregants, Cindy Tether, regularly gives tours and educational classes about our stained glass windows.

RCB also owns expensive real estate properties that currently house staff. The Senior Minister lives in the Manse and an Associate Pastor lives in a house across the street from the church; both are in a very high end real estate market. My husband and I are fortunate to be temporarily housed at a reduced rent in a church-owned condominium in the neighboring town of Tuckahoe. We love it, and wish we could afford to stay here. Our hope is that RCB will extend our stay beyond the generous two year contract! This is a good segue into a giant and important untapped resource at RCB—the intellectual capital, contacts and resources of the congregants which could be directed to address poverty.

I'll use my husband, Glen and myself as an example. Although we are middle class and removed from poverty, we benefit on many levels from the generosity at RCB. Over the summer we were invited to the vacation home of some congregants. Although

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<sup>6</sup> Elliott, *A Celebration*, 26.



the intention of our visit was social, they genuinely listened to us and decided to use their connections to make things happen for us in a way we could not do on our own. When we left their home, we had received foundation funding for a support staff person for me, and arrangements were made for Glen and me to join them for dinner with an entertainment professional who was able to provide connection and opportunity for my husband in the music industry. Glen and I were so inspired and grateful. This is a great example of possibilities for RCB once they enter into relationship with others; they have far-reaching capabilities that are untapped!

I'm thrilled at the recent approval of our "Yonkers" initiative. This pilot is just being launched in Nodine Hill, one small section of Yonkers that is notoriously poor and has been described as the type of place where people live temporarily because they have to. This project will have many moving parts and I believe we will receive a great deal of education in the process.

We will begin the Yonkers Initiative with two important components:

1. The use of graduates from our prison ministry to recruit and mentor some of the street leaders;
2. Formation of friendship teams—led by congregants—around leaders who work on the ground there, starting with Richard Nightingale, Director of Community services Westhab; Ray Reid, Community Youth Center; and The Good Shepard Presbyterian Church's Pastor Ezekiel Herrera.

Eventually we will expand our friendship teams to include the schools, police department, elected officials and other community groups. The friendship teams will meet monthly with leaders on the ground in Nodine Hill. They will listen to a list of

requests from the leaders and then go back to the congregation to meet the requests based on connections and resources just like what was done for Glen and me. They listened, believed deeply in each of us to use the resources responsibly, and provided us with opportunity that we could not have access to on our own, no matter how hard we tried.

### **Reflection Upon Theological Paradigm**

RCB has a wide range in theologies, from staff to consistory to congregants. In addition to different upbringings and denominations among ordained clergy, a huge portion of our staff and congregants grew up (and some remain) Catholic. A smaller percentage comes from evangelical roots. I was recently informed that the Evangelical congregants are growing in number and are significant donors.

Senior Minister, Ken Ruge was raised in the mid-west as Methodist, shaped by Wesleyans and is no doubt influenced by his wife, an Episcopal Priest. He was a seasoned psychotherapist before taking the position at RCB. He is also influenced by Norman Vincent Peale and by his travels in the world and studies of other cultures. His beliefs are Universalistic and pluralistic. His sermons pull from an expansive realm.

Associate Minister, Keith Draght is one of two pastoral staff persons who is traditionally Reformed. He is from Michigan, came out of Willow Creek, and is influenced by the seeker-sensitive model. His gifts and experience made him a natural success as he began “the Gathering,” the informal Sunday evening worship at RCB.

Associate Minister, Cari Pattison describes herself as a biblically-centered evangelical conservative. She grew up in Kansas, attended a liberal mainline Presbyterian Church until college when she became involved in intervarsity. Cari recently discovered

yoga and loved it so much that she became a certified yoga instructor and has added a menu of opportunities to the congregation.

Youth Minister, Addison Quale, from Bronxville, is a conservative evangelical who studied at Gordon Conwell and is currently seeking ordination in the RCA. His libertarian beliefs often conflict with my view of Christian mission. As a result, we have not collaborated as I had in the past with previous Mission and Youth Directors. So far, this has not been problematic, but it does concern me because this collaboration is written in my job description. Addison and I continue to dialogue and grow on our faith journey with the hope of finding common ground that will create fruitful work for us together in the future. This dialogue, while not my favorite thing to do, gives me hope for a more peaceful world. Our beliefs are so different, yet we both sincerely work to engage respectfully in difficult dialogue. My hope is that we can move to a place where we can keep our politics out of our religion but keep our religion in our politics!

The Church School Director, Nursery School Director, Music Ministers and a large percentage of the staff are Roman Catholic. Four of us feel “called” to ministry in a way that Catholicism does not allow women. Each of us believes we are doing work completely in alignment with our Catholic faith beliefs within the RCB.

During a recent discussion among pastoral staff, I was suggesting that Jesus taught us that the way we live our lives is most important if we are to follow Him. The music minister inserted that Worship is most important. Others agreed because you cannot live the way Christ taught unless you are attending worship. I agree that staying connected to God is essential to living a good Christian life, although I am not convinced that worship is the most important means of staying connected to God. It is dependent on

the larger picture of the preaching, music and community. Much like a person eating a meal at McDonald's, versus an organic healthy meal, what you are fed effects the level of nourishment and ability to function optimally in the world. Worship, centering prayer, meditation, scripture, nature, experiencing the Divine in all individuals, life and creation, are all part of staying connected to God and all interdependent. If I go to worship on Sunday and criticize all the components of the service because they are not perfect, and then gossip about my neighbor and pass a hungry hurting person on the way out, I am missing the mark. The discussion that followed highlighted the different theological views within our leadership team.

Despite our diverse roots and range of theological perspectives, I feel hopeful about our work together as a team. Under Ken's leadership, we are each encouraged in our own growth process, but we face real challenges. One danger I see within a structure of committees that operate independently is that we could easily adopt an "us" vs. "them" mentality and compete over limited resources.

The fact that the senior minister, Ken Ruge is a skilled and seasoned therapist and is new to full time congregational life allows him to have a fresh perspective and unfailing strength and faith convictions. The staff is also a group of individuals operating with integrity, principles, kindness and compassion toward one another and, I believe, with the sincere hope for each other's success. I believe this to be a moment in time when there is a chance for significant growth.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **USING RCB RESOURCES TO IMPACT FORMERLY INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS**

#### **Challenge Statement**

The Reformed Church of Bronxville, in Southern Westchester, where I serve as Director of Mission has entered into prison ministry and revitalized the church community with meaningful opportunity for congregants to live their faith. Graduates of the program report great benefits, however they continue to face challenges securing affordable housing, employment with a living wage, healthcare, and other essentials necessary for a life of dignity. This project will create a documentary used as an educational tool to help the congregation be more effective in prison ministry.

#### **The Problem**

Having worked with churches for more than twenty years, I have learned that organizing people to live their faith by responding to social justice issues is a feat usually realized by building community and encouraging neighbor to help neighbor. In Bronxville, residents are well isolated from poverty and injustice. Everything a person needs—exceptional schools, optimal health care, healthy food, farmers markets, parks, groceries, shopping, recreation, sports facilities, country clubs, dining—can all be found within the one square mile radius of Bronxville. If a person wished, one could easily ignore the pain and suffering of people living less than two miles away in Yonkers and Mount Vernon.

It's quite easy to donate money and time to charity and feel that this contribution relieves the responsibility to do more. Because the citizens of Bronxville are well-educated folks who have worked very hard for what they have, many do not realize that

hard work doesn't guarantee every person a stable situation similar to their own. Yet this community is full of people in power with the capability and influence to provide opportunity to those who want to help themselves and improve their own circumstances.

This project will use our congregants' enthusiasm for our current prison ministry pilot to educate around issues of poverty, and to move the congregation from this important first step in prison ministry to begin to examine the root causes of problems and explore solutions. This begins with the mentoring component of the program. It will enable participants from different backgrounds to enter into relationship and learn from each other. Right now the congregants say they want to help, but feel inadequate in the face of our participants' overwhelming needs including housing, employment, supportive community, transportation, financial guidance, technology training, parenting support, relationship counseling, et cetera.

This project is based on the following expected outcomes:

- As people journey with individuals leaving prison and enter into relationship with others different from themselves, they will begin to really want to help them achieve success;
- They will begin to understand the complex problems surrounding poverty which have contributed to the current situation;
- They will begin to see that the children of that these men and women have a hard road ahead of them, that the odds are stacked against them, and that many will likely end up in prison, in gangs, drug addicted or as teenage parents;

- People will find a sense of obligation to address the root causes of problems in poor neighborhoods and to tackle some systemic deficiencies in education, after-school activities, safety, nutrition, health care, foster care and more.

Mentoring has been identified by the Department of Justice as a priority for people leaving prison. Supporting our brothers and sisters on their journey home could potentially shift this community from charity-giving to relationship-building, community-building and eventually to addressing the root causes of poverty. If we could put together think-tanks combining affected people from areas of poverty with financial experts who reside in Bronxville, we might develop innovative solutions to poverty far beyond what any of us alone could dream. Perhaps social entrepreneurship or other ventures will organically emerge from this process.

The church has many resources: financial abundance; a wealth of business experience; great financial minds; spacious facilities, and ample faith in hearts committed to living the Gospel.

Part of the problem is the cultural and economic gap that exists between the participants of our prison ministry and our congregants. Although congregants have been extremely generous and open, there has been a learning curve for all of us involved. The first financial workshops given to our prison ministry participants was focused on savings and investments before it was understood that most participants had never even opened a checking account, and cannot even make their income meet their minimal expenses, let alone figure out how to invest. Mentors began to express that they lacked the tools they needed to help people with housing and jobs. It is not understood that there is a lack of affordable housing stock, or that when calling for services, a participant cannot always

expect a return phone call right away and receive support in the same way a high power congregant would. It has been a process finding balance of giving congregants the resources, tools and support they need to help participants face challenges but also to understand that even if a person doesn't find a perfect job or housing situation right away, the support of the congregation can be helpful and meaningful in other ways. Sometimes the structures and systems are not set up in a way that enables people to flourish. Unless these systems and structures are addressed, often the best we can do is patiently and lovingly journey alongside person as they face struggles.

In addition, being so removed from poverty, people in Bronxville don't always understand the urgency of situations. They can't imagine their own son or daughter living in such an impoverished neighborhood, or with such high incarceration rates, single parents, gangs, violence, drug use, robberies, et cetera. And because RCB is full of people in high-power positions, residents here often think they know best and can go in and fix situations without understanding the complexities or consulting the residents in hardship. While this can be a blessing in many situations—particularly in their motivation to take on huge issues like poverty—it is also tricky because we do not want to be imperialistic, reductionist or arrogant. It is also a challenge to help people understand the need for systemic change when the system is working fine for them.

There is currently investment in this prison ministry. People really want to learn to be effective mentors and to impact the lives of those returning from prison. The church has been approached to partner with the Westchester DA's office and many prison organizations. Other churches have asked to replicate the program. It is time to bring this program up to speed and make it as effective as possible so that we can lead other similar



congregations in meaningful, effective prison ministry. It is time to empower people to move beyond these initial important steps and to engage the deeper issues.

## CHAPTER 3 PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

### COMING HOME PRISON MINISTRY

#### Goals and Strategies

**Goal 1.** Raise awareness of the congregation of the problem of incarceration.

- Strategy 1** Show film, *Zero Percent*, with panel discussion to follow, and other film nights: *Shawshank Redemption*, *The Farm*, *Les Miserables*, *To Catch a Dollar*.
- Strategy 2** Host a speakers series with formerly incarcerated individuals teaching Christian Education Hour including: Tina Reynolds of WORTH; Eric Waters of Osborne; and Darren Ferguson, author of *How I Became an Angry Black Man: From Prison to the Pulpit*.
- Strategy 3** Sponsor an Advocacy Day trip to Albany in concert with Corrections Association, CH graduates, congregants and other participants.
- Strategy 4** Hold “Empowerment Sunday” worship service on January 22, led by formerly incarcerated individuals with a focus on justice and poverty issues and the need for systemic change, with Alfonso Wyatt preaching.
- Strategy 5** Have book club readings for *Fist Stick Knife Gun* by Geoffrey Canada and *How I Became an Angry Black Man: From Prison to the Pulpit* by Darren Ferguson.
- Strategy 6** Bring congregants to Riker’s Island.

**Evaluation of Goal 1:** Survey Monkey will be sent to 460 of the 560 households in the congregation to assess congregants' learning over the course of the project. 30% of the recipients will respond to the survey.

**Goal 2.** Build a team of people to develop a documentary about our prison ministry and issues around incarceration.

**Strategy 1** Create criteria to build a team: what skills, resources and people do I need to create a documentary?

**Strategy 2** Select team members and orient them.

**Evaluation of Goal 2:** Was able to recruit people to work on a team to develop a documentary.

**Goal 3.** The team will develop a documentary which will highlight some of the work of our current prison ministry, as well as what still needs to be addressed to impact formerly incarcerated individuals.

**Strategy 1** Interview former CH participants, mentors, volunteers, and cooks. Highlight different program components: dinner, public policy, narrative, skills workshops, goal setting, and graduation.

**Strategy 2** Include a narrative of a former CH graduate, designed to provide education about systemic issues.

**Strategy 3** Include a thought-provoking narrative about the needs that remain to be addressed to impact formerly incarcerated individuals.

**Evaluation of Goal 3:** 60 percent of people at RCB coffee hour—following Sunday morning worship service—will view the film and fill out a questionnaire.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. What new hermeneutical approach can be taken to shed better light on the situation and open up new options for the congregation in their work with formerly incarcerated individuals and their families? [theology]
2. What have other congregations done to effectively champion formerly incarcerated people in a supportive interactive learning process? [sociology, history, psychology, political science]

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **EVALUATION PROCESS**

RCB has been engaged in prison ministry and something powerful is happening that I would like to understand more. To do so, I will begin an exploratory study using surveys, focus groups and interviews. Anita Lightburn will assist me in this process and help further develop the questions.

- 1 . I will survey the entire congregation using Research Monkey.
  - What have you learned since we began prison ministry?
  - What events have you attended? What was your reaction?
  - Have you changed, or grown spiritually?
  - What would you like to see our church do in the future?
  - Do you believe there is something you can do to make a difference?
- 2 . I will have focus groups with volunteers: cooks, teachers, mentors, skills support people (computers, resumes, finance).
  - What is it that is moving you?
  - How have you changed?
  - What was difficult?
  - What more needs to be done?
- 3 . I will have focus groups and individual meetings with mentors to discover:
  - What worked?
  - What was most difficult?

- How have you grown or changed?
- What have you learned?

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **COMPETENCIES: SPIRITUAL STRENGTH AND LEADERSHIP**

On April 14, 2011, the Site Team and Dawn Ravella met and together engaged in a process of assessing Dawn's current level of competency in a variety of areas of ministry as they are related to the multi-faith context. The final report determined that to successfully carry out this demonstration project the candidate is to improve skills as a Spiritual Leader and Administrator.

#### **1. Knowledge and appreciation of one's own faith tradition - continue**

Dawn has demonstrated her knowledge of her faith by using the Gospels, Catholic Social Teachings, Encyclicals and pastoral letters to organize Catholics to engage in a variety of social justice issues and to live their faith by responding to these teachings. She has mobilized parishioners to reach out to one another and respond to issues of poverty through many programs and projects. She has also organized a Public Policy Education Network, enlisting Catholics on Long Island to become engaged in the political process and have their voice in the public arena regarding issues of poverty and justice, such as welfare reform, immigrant rights, the death penalty, health care, the Millennium Development Goals, and more.

## **2. Knowledge and appreciation of the values of other faith traditions - continue**

Dawn would like to be more knowledgeable and show appreciation for other faith traditions that are not her own. She appreciates the common nugget of truth that is in each tradition and has worked collaboratively in a multi-faith context on issues of housing, immigration, trafficking, peacemaking dialogue, and more. She believes it will be helpful to understand others traditions to show respect and hospitality; for example, at a recent luncheon she hosted, she needed to prepare and serve food that was Kosher and Halal.

## **3. Ability to engage productively in dialogue - continue**

Dawn is experienced in engaging in dialogue with other faith traditions, and with those who hold different faith commitments. She is genuinely open, respectful and curious about other beliefs. She believes that to create change in the world it is helpful to have many different voices from different traditions working together.

## **4. Ability to interpret sacred texts - develop**

As a Roman Catholic and a woman, Dawn was not encouraged to study scripture to the depth that would be helpful in the Reformed Church where she is now employed. Her scripture study will be especially important as a tool to engage the congregants and others to enter into prison ministry based on their faith beliefs.

## **5. Ability as worship leader - no basis**

Dawn is not ordained, and is not seeking ordination. She will not lead worship.

## **6. Facilitating transformation - continue**

The group felt that this is key to the Coming Home Prison ministry. Transformation is already happening in our community and as we open this ministry up to other faiths, more skills will be developed.



#### **7. Ability as multi-faith leader - continue**

Dawn has been successful in developing many programs and projects by beginning with the gifts of the people in the community and helping people to make those gifts manifest—by responding to their call, and what makes them come alive. She empowers others to take leadership roles and in the time that she has been at RCB, she has empowered many to spearhead ministries that were formerly led by staff. She is good at delegating and also willing to spearhead efforts that will educate and generate enthusiasm. She tries to keep her finger on the pulse of the needs and gifts in the community and is good at connecting the dots. She is also always walking the line of how far to push people to go deeper and discern the Christian call to respond to poverty and justice issues.

#### **8. Ability to serve as a multi-faith religious educator - develop**

While Dawn is always challenging people to use their gifts to build the Kingdom of God on earth, she usually brings in speakers, films and books. She would like to develop her own skills as a communicator and educator to raise awareness and move people to action for justice.

#### **9. Ability as counselor in a multi-faith context - continue**

Dawn is an LMSW and experienced in counseling. She considers it a great honor to hear the experience of another and to journey with them in the healing process. Dawn has a genuine belief in the inner-strength and Spirit that exists within each of us and within the community.

**10. Spiritual Leader - attention**

Although Dawn is grounded in spiritual disciplines, she feels the need to work on strength, confidence and ability to communicate better and become a theologian. Dawn has always been very effective, working behind the scenes to make things happen by utilizing the gifts and knowledge of others. She would like to take this opportunity to use her voice and to expand her own leadership skills.

**11. Witness - continue**

Dawn has practiced bearing witness in a multi-faith context through engagement in housing justice, opening homeless shelters, engaging others in policy issues for affordable housing and supportive services.

**12. Administrator - develop**

This will be important for this demonstration project. Dawn expressed needing help with this. It will be important in this process to be very organized, to learn how to do more formal evaluations, keep budgets, and records. Dawn will enlist administrative support from others to accomplish this task.

**13. Organizer - continue**

Dawn has had many experiences organizing communities to work for change for the common good. Some examples include: the opening of a community food pantry, organizing a journey to justice in response to escalating violence around new neighbors from El Salvador, lobbying for hunger and poverty issues, the millennium development goals, and the creation of the first Public Policy Education Network in the Diocese of Rockville Centre.

#### **14. Professional - continue**

Dawn takes seriously her role as a professional social worker and minister. She attempts to prayerfully respond to current events and remain rooted in integrity and Christian values, which are often counter-cultural. She is committed to organizing the community to live their faith in the public arena.

## **Appendixes**

**Appendix 1: Timeline  
2011 Timeline**

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Saturday	10/22/2011	ALL DAY - CONSISTORY retreat					
Sunday	10/23/2011	7am - WORKOUT with meditation meeting with Karla Diserens- mentor at pancake breakfast to work out her role					
Monday	10/24/2011	7am - WORKOUT with meditation					
Tuesday	10/25/2011	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns 1-2:30					
Tuesday	11/1/2011	participant interviews 6-9pm					referrals coming for interviews from Exodus, Hour Children, Strive, Westhab, and the Westchester DA office
Wednesday	11/2/2011	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 1: Tom Rodman, Empowerment for Change
Tuesday	11/8/2011	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns					
Wednesday	11/9/2011	7am - WORKOUT Fishkill Prison with Rye Pres- 11-4 conflict here visit to Hour Children 1-3 with Sarah Lawrence Journalism student to work on narratives 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 2: Goal Setting Anne Teicher
Thursday	11/10/2011	7am - WORKOUT clean and shop today because home full of musicians and speeding train when I return					*conflict on schedule- either Fishkill Prison with Rye Pres. or Hour Children with Sarah Lawrence
Friday	11/11/2011	10am-Midnight - Landmark Forum: Advanced		me	850	me	still have \$480 in Personal Education budget- Dawn and Glen pay remainder
Saturday	11/12/2011	10am-Midnight - Landmark Forum: Advanced					
Sunday	11/13/2011	10am-Midnight - Landmark Forum: Advanced					
Monday	11/14/2011	7am - WORKOUT Music That Matters concert _-, participants, former participants and families all invited					musicians staying with Dawn and Glen children's choir doing Glens song "People of the Earth"
Tuesday	11/15/2011	7pm-10:15pm - Landmark Forum: Advanced supervise social work interns 1-2:30 To Catch a Dollar film screening and					

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		panel discussion 6pm					
Wednesday	11/16/2011	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 3: Goal Setting with Mentor #1
Sunday	11/20/2011	7am - WORKOUT lunch and learn- meet with mentors after worship					experienced mentors and program graduates meet with new volunteers
Monday	11/21/2011	7am - WORKOUT					
Tuesday	11/22/2011	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					
Wednesday	11/23/2011	7am - WORKOUT Coming Home					Thanksgiving celebration
Tuesday	11/29/2011	7am - WORKOUT Dawn doing stress reduction seminar to Women's Bible study at 8am (ha!) supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					use same class as Sept 11 and modify- aromatherapy, hypnotherapy, chant, scripture passages etc. book Sabbath and Radical Acceptance- altar
Wednesday	11/30/2011	7am - WORKOUT NYTS Sing Sing fundraiser 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		*need to try and get funding for Sing Sing fundraiser	Session 4: Speaking Your Truth #1 Craig Young
Tuesday	12/6/2011	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					
Wednesday	12/7/2011	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home drive Winnie to Atlanta after meeting Dec -11		me		RCB	Session 5: Self Image and Value: Derek, Joan Lomius and Marie Dunn
Tuesday	12/13/2011	supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					
Wednesday	12/14/2011	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 6: Goal Setting with Mentor #2
Sunday	12/18/2011	7am - WORKOUT lunch and learn with mentors 12 noon					Jane Elliot Blue eyed brown eyed film after coffee hour with mentors and discussion of goal setting
Monday	12/19/2011	7am - WORKOUT					
Tuesday	12/20/2011	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					
Wednesday	12/21/2011	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 7: Speaking Your Truth #2
Tuesday	12/27/2011	supervise social work interns 1pm- 2:30					
Friday	12/30/2011	7am - WORKOUT Study Time					

### 2012 Timeline

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Tuesday	1/3/2012	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns 1-2:30					
Wednesday	1/4/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 8: Trauma reenactment with rev. Dr. Ken Ruge
Friday	1/6/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time					
Sunday	1/8/2012	7am - WORKOUT lunch and learn following worship					discussion with mentors about trauma workshop
Tuesday	1/10/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting					
Wednesday	1/11/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 9: Goal Setting with Mentor #3 Tony Lemberger working with resumes
Friday	1/13/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time					
Sunday	1/15/2012	7am - WORKOUT lunch and learn at 12noon					follow up support for mentors on goal setting. listening skills workshop
Tuesday	1/17/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting					
Wednesday	1/18/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 10: Speaking Your Truth # 3 mentors visit half way house
Friday	1/20/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time					
Sunday	1/22/2012	7am - WORKOUT Empowerment Sunday		Bill Hertline			Alfonso Wyatt preaching. Worship includes formerly incarcerated NYTS graduates
Tuesday	1/24/2012	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns					
Wednesday	1/25/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 11: World of Work #1
Friday	1/27/2012	7am - WORKOUT					
Tuesday	1/31/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie)					

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting					
Wednesday	2/1/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 12: Goal Setting with Mentor #4
Friday	2/3/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time					
Sunday	2/5/2012	6:30 a.m. - 10:00 a.m. Breakfast Run					
Tuesday	2/7/2012	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns					
Wednesday	2/8/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6pm-8:45pm - Coming Home		me		RCB	Session 13: World of Work # 2
Friday	2/10/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	2/11/2012	Clothing Closet Sale					
Sunday	2/12/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 3:00 - 5:00 - Coming Home Graduation		me		RCB	Session 14: Graduation & Speakers Night
Tuesday	2/14/2012	7am - WORKOUT supervise social work interns		me			
Wednesday	2/15/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Biewirth)		me			
Thursday	2/16/2012	6:30 p.m. - Matisyahu Benefit Concert					
Friday	2/17/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Sunday	2/19/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship					
Tuesday	2/21/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	2/22/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Biewirth)					
Friday	2/24/2012	7am - WORKOUT		me			



DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		Study Time					
Sunday	2/26/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship					
Tuesday	2/28/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-8:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	2/29/2012	7am - WORKOUT 8:30a.m. - noon - Soup Kitchen 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)					
Friday	3/2/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	3/3/2012	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. - Westhab Playgroup					
Sunday	3/4/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship					
Tuesday	3/6/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-8:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	3/7/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)					
Friday	3/9/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	3/10/2012	8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Project Hammer 8:30 p.m. - 1:00 a.m. Midnight Run					
Sunday	3/11/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship					

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Tuesday	3/13/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	3/15/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)					
Friday	3/16/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Sunday	3/18/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship					
Tuesday	3/20/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	3/21/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)					
Friday	3/23/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	3/24/2012	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. - Westhab Playgroup					
Sunday	3/25/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	3/27/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	3/29/2012	7am - WORKOUT 8:30a.m. - noon - Soup Kitchen 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)		me			

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Friday	3/30/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Sunday	4/1/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	4/3/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	4/4/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)		me			
Friday	4/6/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	4/7/2012	10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. - Westhab Playgroup					
Sunday	4/8/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	4/10/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	4/11/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)		me			
Friday	4/13/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	4/14/2012	8:30 a.m.-3:00 p.m. Project Hammer					
Sunday	4/15/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	4/17/2012	7am - WORKOUT		me			

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting					
Wednesday	4/18/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)					
Friday	4/20/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Saturday	4/21/2012	8:30 p.m. - 1:00 a.m. Midnight Run 10:00 a.m.-1:00 p.m. - Westhab Playgroup					
Sunday	4/22/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	4/24/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	4/25/2012	7am - WORKOUT 8:30a.m. - noon - Soup Kitchen 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)		me			
Friday	4/27/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Sunday	4/29/2012	8:30 - Worship 9:15-10:15 - Christian Education 10:30-11:30 - Worship 11:30 - 12:30 - Coffee Hour 12:30 - 2 - Intern Supervision (Tammie) 5:00-6:00 - The Gathering Worship		me			
Tuesday	5/1/2012	7am - WORKOUT 10:30-11 - Staff Prayer 11:00-12:00 - Staff Meeting 12:00-1:30 - Intern Supervision (Marie) 1:30-3:00 - Dorcas Meeting for Yonkers Project 7:30-9:30 - Council or Consistory Meeting		me			
Wednesday	5/2/2012	7am - WORKOUT 6:30p.m.-9:30p.m. - Working on Documentary (with Emily Bierwirth)		me			

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Friday	5/4/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/11/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/18/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/25/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	6/1/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	6/8/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	6/15/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	6/22/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	6/29/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	7/6/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	7/13/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	7/20/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	7/27/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	8/3/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	8/10/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	8/17/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	8/24/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	8/31/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	9/7/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	9/14/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	9/21/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	9/28/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Friday	10/12/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	10/19/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	10/26/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	11/2/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	11/9/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	11/16/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	11/23/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	11/30/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	12/7/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	12/14/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	12/21/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	12/28/2012	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			

### 2013 Timeline

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
Friday	1/4/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	1/11/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	1/18/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	1/25/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	2/1/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	2/8/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	2/15/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	2/22/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	3/1/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	3/8/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	3/15/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	3/22/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	3/29/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	4/5/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	4/12/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	4/19/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	4/26/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/3/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/10/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/17/2013	7am - WORKOUT Study Time		me			
Friday	5/24/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			

DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		Study Time					
Friday	5/31/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	6/7/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	6/14/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	6/21/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	6/28/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	7/5/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	7/12/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	7/19/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	7/26/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	8/2/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	8/9/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	8/16/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	8/23/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	8/30/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	9/6/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	9/13/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	9/20/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	9/27/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	10/4/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	10/11/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	10/18/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	10/25/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			



DAY	DATE	TASK/ACTIVITY	TOOLS	PERSON	COST	FUNDING	NOTES
		Study Time					
Friday	11/1/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	11/8/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	11/15/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	11/22/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	11/29/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	12/6/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	12/13/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	12/20/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					
Friday	12/27/2013	7am - WORKOUT		me			
		Study Time					

## Appendix 2 Coming Home Budget

<b>COMING HOME BUDGET</b>	
<b>November 2011- February 2012</b>	
<b>Budget Elements</b>	<b>Estimated Expenditures</b>
Graduate Coordinator	\$1,500
Participant Stipends	\$1,800
Food and Supplies	\$1,000
Social Work Support	\$0
Beck Institute Research & Training	\$10,000
Misc. Expenses	\$500
Mentor Training	\$500
Transportation	\$3,600
Landmark (Competency ~ basic and advanced)	\$1,410
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$20,310</b>
Participants' stipend estimate is based on an average of 10 participants for 18 sessions at \$10 per session.	

**Appendix 3: Goal Setting Worksheets**

**“Panim El Panim”  
Life-Skills Empowerment Program  
Fall 2012**

**Coordinated by  
The Reformed Church of Bronxville**

**GOAL SETTING WORKSHEETS**

**Employment/Career  
Personal Finances  
Personal Health  
Family/Personal Relationships  
Education/Training/Intellectual Development  
Spiritual Development  
Taking Care of Unfinished Business  
Miscellaneous/Other**

## GOALS FOR EMPLOYMENT/CAREER

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

## GOALS FOR TAKING CARE OF PERSONAL FINANCES

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

# GOALS FOR PERSONAL HEALTH

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

## GOALS FOR FAMILY/PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

## GOALS FOR EDUCATION/TRAINING/INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	



## **SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT**

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #3:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #4:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Barriers:

Accomplishments:

## GOALS FOR TAKING CARE OF UNFINISHED BUSINESS

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

## GOALS FOR TAKING CARE OF MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #1:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #2:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

### MISCELLANEOUS/OTHER

LONG TERM GOAL:

Medium/Short Term Goal #3:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Medium/Short Term Goal #4:

Action Steps	Date Completed
1.	
2	
3.	
4.	

Barriers:

Accomplishments:

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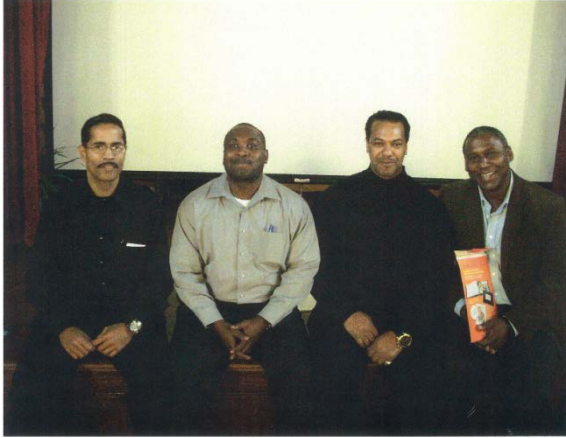
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## Appendix B

### Coming Home at RCB



**Appendix C**  
**Samson Unshackled\***

\*Note: “Samson Unshackled” used with the author’s permission.

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EXODUS: A STORY FOR OUR TIME

One of the two crucial root experiences in the history of Israel's religious tradition is the Exodus. The Hebrews' Exodus from bondage in Egypt is a story that has captured the imagination of generation after generation. African slaves in America saw in the Exodus event God's hand to liberate them from bondage. As slaves, they strongly identified with the Hebrews in bondage in Egypt. In the taskmasters and supervisors of the Hebrew people, they saw their masters and their overseers. When this story was told to African slaves and their descendants, they felt the heavy hand of bondage, of slavery, that the Hebrews suffered. They could empathize with them. They had the mark of slavery on their backs. As they heard this story again and again, they made it their own. They came to believe that God would be an active agent in their liberation from slavery in America. In the 1800's this story influenced three slaves who led the major slave rebellions in America, Denmark Vesey, Gabriel Prosser and Nat Turner.

In the late 1960's and early 1970's, when James Cone was articulating a theology of Black liberation, he looked to the Exodus event and the slave revolts led by Vesey, Prosser and Turner. He called them "freedom fighters."<sup>3</sup> The Exodus story also influenced Harriet Tubman, a descendant of African slaves, called the "Moses of her people." She was a "conductor" on the "Underground Railroad," an escape route from slavery to freedom. Like Moses, Tubman led many of her people out of bondage in the

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<sup>3</sup> James Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (New York: Seabury Press, 1969; repr. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989); *A Black Theology of Liberation* (New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1970; repr. Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1990).

Southern slave states in America to freedom in the Northern part of the country, even as far as Canada. Hollywood has even taken the Exodus event, brought it to the silver screen, turned Moses into a star. Yes, this story has captured the imagination of generation after generation.

People of faith in bondage can look to the Exodus event and see a message for them, even prisoners; there's a message in the Exodus story for us.

Years ago, a prison chaplain in New York, Edwin Muller, a United Methodist clergyman, started a religious program in Green Haven Prison in Stormville, New York. He called it "Exodus." He took the Biblical story of the Hebrews' passage from bondage, through the wilderness and to the Promised Land and related it to prisoners' experiences. He stated that prisoners think of life "on the streets" as the "Promised Land." So the primary goal of people imprisoned is to get out. Rev. Muller stated that many ex-cons fail to reintegrate into society because they see the streets as the Promised Land when in actuality the streets is the wilderness. So, in Rev. Muller's view, prisoners must go from prison (bondage), through the streets (the wilderness) and on to a future of hope (the Promised Land). Rev. Muller has stated that "Exodus is designed to assist inmates in making the transition back into society, helping them both to overcome 'destructive dependency patterns fostered by the prison system,' and 'to set practical and attainable goals that will create new options and a new future for themselves and their families.'"<sup>4</sup>

As we can see, the Exodus event is relevant to prisoners. It's a story for our time, and our prisoners. Now, let's look a little closer at the Exodus story itself. As

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<sup>4</sup> Gloria Askew and Gayraud Wilmore, eds., *Reclamation of Black Prisoners: A Challenge to the African American Church* (Atlanta: The Interdenominational Theological Center Press, 1992), pp. 65-66.



stated in the beginning of this essay, it's crucial to Israel's religious tradition. It has captured the imagination of descendants of African slaves, of theologians and of Hollywood filmmakers. It has even captured the imagination of a prison chaplain who started a program for prisoners called Exodus.

The principal character in the Exodus story is Moses. Moses is not only the principal character in the story, but he's the most important person in Jewish religious history. His mother and his father were Levites. At the time of his birth, there was a command from Pharaoh to his people that "Every boy that is born to the Hebrews you shall throw into the Nile, but you shall let every girl live" (Ex 2:22). Now, in a society that is governed and run by men, the people feared most, in terms of revolutionary potential and being a threat to the status quo, are the men within the society that are from the oppressed group, who would want the power and position they hold. Today, in America, in the African-American community, we hear about the "conspiracy to destroy Black boys." Prison is stated as being part of this larger conspiracy. African-Americans rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition have always looked to the Bible for parallels in their lives. If you are African-American and you look at the Exodus event, you say, "Instead of throwing the African-American boys into the Nile, they are thrown into prison." Granted, their own acts landed them in prison, but there's something else at work here, something greater than them.

Moses was born during a time of bondage for his people. He was subject to being thrown into the Nile because he was a Hebrew boy. His mother tried to protect him, in fact hid him. But when he was three months old she could hide him no more. She put him in a basket and placed it in the river. The daughter of Pharaoh discovered

the basket and the crying baby. She took him into her home, named him Moses.

Moses grew up as an orphan in Pharaoh's household.

When Moses came of age, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew. He killed the Egyptian. Yes, the most important person in Israel's religious history was a murderer, though he was never brought to justice for this murder. After this, Moses had a quick reputation as a hot head. News travels quickly, then as now. The next day, Moses saw two Hebrews fighting. He said to the one who was in the wrong, "Why do you strike your fellow Hebrew" (Ex 2:13b)? Instead of answering this question, the Hebrew in the wrong said, "Who made you a ruler and judge over us? Do you mean to kill me as you killed the Egyptian" (Ex 2:14)? Only a day had passed, but the people knew that Moses had killed an Egyptian. He already had a reputation as a murderer who might kill again. Moses knew that word would get back to Pharaoh, so it was time for him to get out of Dodge, as we would say. He fled Egypt. He became a fugitive. He's on the run from the law. He fled to the land of Midian.

In Midian Moses began to lead another life, put his life as a murderer behind him. He got married. He had a son. He kept the flock of his father-in-law, Jethro. Years passed and the king of Egypt died.

One day, while Moses was tending the flock of his father-in-law, he came across a flaming bush. God called to him, "Moses, Moses!" Moses answered. God was revealed to Moses, but Moses was afraid to look at the face of God. The Lord told Moses about the misery of the Hebrews in bondage in Egypt. The Lord told Moses that he would bring the Hebrews out of bondage. Moses said, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt" (Ex 3:11)? Moses didn't say anything

about being a fugitive, a murderer who's on the run, who's never been brought to justice. Probably the main reason why Moses didn't want to return to Egypt was the fact that he was a fugitive from the law, for murder. For some reason that we can't comprehend, because our society executes or imprisons murderers for life or for very long terms of imprisonment, Moses, a murderer, was chosen by God not only to be the person to lead the Hebrew people out of bondage, but the person who will be "handed" the Law to hand down to his people. This is either great irony or redemption beyond our limited understanding.

Some prisoners have been convicted of murder. Maybe some of them committed murders and were never caught. I have heard a lot of talk about committing murder from prisoners. If half the talk is true, we have a lot of murderers in our prisons. Maybe drug dealers, in selling drugs to people, perpetrated murder in another form. In any event, the story of Moses doesn't tell us that God overlooks murder, but that God used a murderer for God's design. Moses was called to do an extraordinary act. Regardless of what crimes prisoners have been convicted of, after their term of imprisonment they can lead new lives. They may not be called to do extraordinary acts, like Moses, but they can do the right thing, seek to make amends for their crimes in whatever manner they can.

When prisoners look to the Exodus event, they think strictly in terms of liberation. Rev. Muller stated that prisoners think in terms of returning to the streets, the Promised Land.

God instructed Moses to bring the Israelites out of Egypt, for a specific, expressed purpose. Moses was given one instruction over and over again by God to

deliver to Pharaoh: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." That's the main reason for the coming out of Egypt. It's a spiritual coming out. And although the coming out of Egypt was spiritual, it's also physical. It's a spiritual and a physical coming out of Egypt. The spiritual chains of bondage must be removed. The physical chains of bondage must likewise be removed. (When prisoners are released from prison, the first thing they should do of their own free will and accord, is to go to church, become a part of the body of Christ, and seek spiritual renewal. We know that the first thing prisoners are compelled to do is report to their parole officers. The very next place prisoners should go is a church, even if it's just to offer thanksgiving to God for bringing them out of prison.

Moses went to Pharaoh, told him what God had instructed him to: "Let my people go, so that they may worship me." We know how when people got a good thing going for them, they don't want to give it up. Pharaoh didn't want to give up a good thing, the institution of Hebrew slavery. Slavers in America likewise didn't want to give up a good thing, the institution of African slavery. Prison authorities don't want to give up a good thing, the prison-industrial complex. So Moses' fears were justified. As he'd said to God, "Who am I that I shall go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?"

Pharaoh and the Egyptian people had such a good thing going in the enslavement of the Hebrew people, that it's going to take much more than Moses' request to let his people go so that they can worship their God to convince Pharaoh to let the Hebrew slaves go. Pharaoh had a hard heart and probably a hard head. So now God had to intervene, had to show Pharaoh a thing or two. I should say ten things, the ten plagues. The first plague: the Nile was polluted. Still, Pharaoh wouldn't let the

Hebrews go. The second plague: the country was swarmed with frogs. Still no release of Hebrew slaves. The third and fourth plagues: gnats and flies buzzed about the land. Still no release for the slaves. The fifth and sixth plagues: cattle died and the people were afflicted with boils. Pharaoh hasn't softened up yet. The seventh plague: thunder, hail, rain and lightning was heard throughout the land. You'd think that Pharaoh would've wised up, come to his senses by now, but no. No release of slaves. The eighth plague: the locusts swarmed across the land. Eight plagues down, two to go. The ninth plague: darkness fell over the land. Still, Pharaoh didn't see the light. The tenth and final plague: the death of all firstborns of the Egyptians, from Pharaoh's firstborn to the firstborn of livestock. Moses finally got Pharaoh's undivided attention. He "summoned Moses and Aaron in the night, and said, 'Rise up, go away from my people, both you and the Israelites! Go, worship the Lord, as you said'" (Ex 12:31). Even Pharaoh acknowledged that the coming out of Egypt was for the expressed purpose to worship the Lord!

Even after ten plagues, when the reality of the Hebrew Exodus was set in motion, Pharaoh and his officials had second thoughts. They said, "What have we done, letting Israel leave our service" (Ex 14:5)? In other words, we had a good thing going. We can't let this way of life go from us like this, not without a fight. It was hard for the Egyptians to accept and believe that those good days would soon be over. They forgot about the ten plagues, or ignored them now that they were over. In a reversal, Pharaoh prepared his army and set out to overtake the Hebrew people, to either return them to bondage in Egypt or to kill them.

The fleeing Hebrews saw the army of Pharaoh fast approaching. They feared



what might happen to them. Their faith was being put to the test. They said to Moses, “Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us, bringing us out of Egypt? Is this not the very thing we told you in Egypt, ‘Let us alone and let us serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness” (Ex 14:11-12). Today we would call this the “slave mentality,” a state of psychological dependence upon one’s masters.

Since God has called the Hebrews out of bondage in Egypt to worship God, Moses told his people not to fear, that God would fight for them. First God put a cloud between the Egyptians and the Hebrews. This helped them make it to the sea. When Moses and his people came to the sea, it was parted; there was dry land between walls of water for them to pass. The Hebrews crossed, the Egyptians pursued them, the water was made to return to its normal depth, and the Egyptians were tossed into the sea. The Hebrews have been delivered from Egyptian bondage.

The Hebrews were now in the wilderness. They had their freedom, but they had their complaints. They hungered for food; they thirsted for water. They complained to Moses and Aaron, “If only we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the fleshpots and ate our fill of bread; for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger” (Ex 16:3). The Israelites still hadn’t shaken off the psychological chains of bondage, of dependence. They thought that the state of slavery they’d escaped was better than provisional freedom in the wilderness. This wilderness experience though was just part of the trek towards actual freedom in the Promised Land. It was part of the test God put to the Israelites. They

were given manna (bread) for their hunger. Still, they complained against Moses, “Why did you bring us out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst” (Ex 17:3b)? Moses complained to the Lord that the people were so thirsty they were ready to stone him. The Lord told Moses how to give the people water so that they could drink. He did this. Despite having seen the ten plagues visited upon Egypt, despite having seen the sea part for them to cross and then close on the pursuing Egyptians, despite having been delivered from bondage in Egypt, despite having seen bread rain from heaven, despite having seen water come from a rock, the people wanted to know, “is the Lord among us or not” (Ex 17:7)? It’s pretty obvious that the Lord was with them. Still, they complained; they wanted to know if God was with them.

In the wilderness, the second of the two crucial root experiences in the history of Israel took place. The theophany. God appearing at Mount Sinai. God descended upon Mount Sinai and summoned Moses to the top of the mountain. God spoke to Moses, gave him instructions to bring down to the people. When Moses came down from the mountain, God gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery” (Ex 20:2). This is a preface to the Ten Commandments, which summarized the meaning of the Exodus, “setting the law within the context of God’s redemptive action,”<sup>5</sup> of bringing the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. Jewish tradition, though, considers this to be the first commandment. The Ten Commandments are:

1. You shall have no other gods before me.
2. You shall not make for me any graven images or any likeness.
3. You shall not invoke the Name of Yahweh your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.

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<sup>5</sup> Bruce M. Metzger and Roland E. Murphy, eds., *The New Oxford Annotated Bible with the Apocrypha/Deuterocanonical Books* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 95 OT, n. 20.2.

5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not commit murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbors.
10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house (Ex 20:2-17).

This is the foundation of Jewish law. We must make reference to the Sixth Commandment, since Moses was a murderer. As stated earlier, this is either great irony or redemption beyond our limited understanding.

The theophany concluded with the following:

When all the people witnessed the thunder and lightning, the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, they were afraid and trembled and stood at a distance, and said to Moses, "You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come only to test you and to put the fear of him upon you so that you do not sin." Then the people stood at a distance, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was (Ex 20:18-21).

After this the people of Israel made a covenant with the Lord. They will follow the law.

The Exodus was about the spiritual and physical coming out of Egypt, out of slavery. . . When prisoners look at the Exodus event, they can identify with the Hebrew slaves. Prisoners tend not to think of themselves as slaves, but they are, in everything but name. If prison authorities decided to call prisoners slaves, they could. We may say, but slavery was abolished in 1865 with the Thirteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. Yes, that's true, but there's one very important stipulation: "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except* as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States or any place subject to their jurisdiction." So, if people have been duly convicted of crimes, they can be treated like slaves. When we look closely at the structure of prison, prisoners are in



fact treated like slaves. The prison economy benefits everybody but prisoners, from employees of the prison system to telephone companies to local vendors. From the convict lease system to the chain gang to the prison-industrial complex, prisons have always benefited everybody but prisoners.

The courts have upheld this treatment of prisoners as slaves. In an 1891 case in Virginia, a court ruled: “[The prisoner] has, as a consequence of his crime, not only forfeited his liberty, but all his personal rights except those which the law in its humanity accords to him. He is for the time being the slave of the State.”<sup>6</sup> As late as 1970, other courts have upheld this reasoning.

Now, there's a fatal flaw in our reasoning when we think of slavery. We think of it solely in terms of African slavery, but most peoples suffered slavery. In the Americas Indians were enslaved; there were White indentured servants as well as slaves. In fact, the word “slave” comes from “Slav,” people from Eastern Europe who were enslaved during their history. Many peoples were enslaved during their history, not just Africans. I say this because many of us try to distance ourselves from the whole idea of slavery, as if our predecessors weren't slaves. Historically that's not true. Regardless of race, creed or color, prisoners are slaves in everything but name, slaves of the State.

Slavery in America started out as an economic institution but became a racial one. Imprisonment started out as a system of punishment -- actually, as a system of penance, but now it's something else.

If I may, I think prisoners can make this connection with the Hebrews in bondage in Egypt. Imprisonment in the United States has attributes similar to slavery, whether in

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<sup>6</sup> *Ruffin v. Commonwealth*, 62 Va. (21 Gratt.) 796 (1891).

Egypt or America. There are other connections to the Hebrew experience in Egypt. Egypt was a world power. America is a world power. Egypt benefited from Hebrew slavery. America benefits from imprisonment. So let's look at imprisonment as a form of slavery. The Constitution says this much. Let's think in terms of a future exodus from this state, this state of imprisonment, which is slavery. This state, although it's physical, is spiritual, too. Prisoners need to be spiritually free, free from ideas that the Spirit is otherworldly. The Spirit is of this world. The Spirit is active in lives today.

We must also deal with psychological imprisonment. The dependence created by imprisonment. When we look at the high rate of re-imprisonment, of recidivism – let's conservatively estimate it at 60 percent, 6 out of 10 prisoners come back to prison – let's ask ourselves why? Why do prisoners return to prison at such a high rate? Are they better off there? Remember what the Hebrew slaves said when they'd fled bondage in Egypt and were on the road towards the wilderness. In Egypt, in slavery, we had food and drink; we had few worries. They had become dependent on the system of slavery, as many of prisoners seem to have become dependent upon the system of imprisonment. Prisoners have said, "Three hots and a cot. The food is free, medical attention is free, everything's free!" That's not true. Prisoners pay a price beyond calculating. Yet it seems like when prisoners are on the streets, in the wilderness, they can't survive or don't believe that they can survive. They come back to prison. Do they want to come back to prison? What can they do about this? They can do as the Hebrews did in the wilderness. Make a covenant with God, obey the law, participate in the life of the community and keep their eyes on where they're going, the Promised Land. These things will keep them out of trouble. They should also enter

covenants with their families and friends, create realistic goals and plans to carry them out, create a future of hope. Spend quality time with their families and our friends.

These things will keep them out of trouble.

The journey from prison to the streets to a future of hope isn't an easy one. The Exodus wasn't easy. It required the people's faith. It required the people to obey the law. It required the people to create a community. It required the people to always keep their eyes on the prize, the Promised Land. Prisoners can do these things if they keep the faith, follow the law, participate in the life of the community, and keep their eyes on the prize, a future of hope.

**Appendix D**  
**Beck Institute Evaluation**

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**INTERIM REPORT - SEPTEMBER 2011**

**Narrative for the Reformed Church of Bronxville Study of Participants, Including Consumer Satisfaction Survey Report**

The following description represents data collected after the completion of the Coming Home Program Spring 2011. It is not traditional base line data, as it was collected after they attended the program. The data collected from a questionnaire includes a profile of participants, how they feel they have changed, as well as a consumer satisfaction report. Focus group with participants further qualified this data. Data will again be collected at 6 months to review changes from this post program point. It is hoped that more of the participants will be involved in this review, than the eight represented here. At that time trends in the data will be provided that identify changes that have endured and participants views about what was important in supporting their progress. A companion report overviews the program process "what worked" and "areas for improvement."

Important to note is the consistent report of participant's appreciation of the Coming Home Program indicated in the consumer satisfaction review and in the participant focus groups. The majority of the eight participants who completed the surveyed indicated that they liked the program, were able to get the services that they needed, learned how to improve their lives in skill sessions that met their expectations. Furthermore they would recommend this program to others. The majority of participants felt that they were more able to cope with problems, and that they had people with whom they could do meaningful things.

Participants felt that staff was supportive and available; all agreed that staff believed they could grow, change and recover. All felt comfortable asking questions. The majority felt they were encouraged to take responsibility and were comfortable working with mentors on their set goals. Similarly they indicated that mentors and staff understood their experiences and concerns and that they would stay in touch with them. Only one did not feel understood by their mentor and in general indicated that the program staff did not meet their needs. Analysis of the standardized measure indicated that this individual was not as able as others to make use of the opportunities the program offered. The majority valued developing their life story and appreciated the opportunity to share this with others.

The overall provision of this multidimensional program offered participants the essentials that are designated by SAMSHA (the substance abuse and mental health arm of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service) as critical for recovery, with a capabilities approach that emphasizes what people in transition can do. Recovery means developing a productive and meaningful life in community. The provision of an interim community experience is fundamental to people in transition, particularly those returning from prison. And while this program is not specifically focused on spiritual growth, participants identified spiritual growth as important to them. One participant said, "I'm not a religious person but that social spiritual connection is what got me here every week. Made it feel home." A number of participants felt that they experienced spiritual growth and increased their involvement in a congregation. Another comment captured others sentiment, that coming to the program was "replenishing". It made such a difference to have people genuinely accept you and not judge you at such a difficult time.

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There were many challenges that participants experienced as they sought housing and jobs and rejoined their families. The support offered in the Coming Home Program began a process for many that continue as they work on meeting their goals. It is an arduous journey to return to a world that has changed dramatically. Their high hopes, even preparation with education have not been enough to manage the changed terrain, particularly in the current economic climate. Partnerships with the Coming Home Program were seen as a beginning, with hope that more possibilities would emerge for them through the connections they had made here. The participants for the most realize more now how difficult it is to transition back to community and what it will take to be successful. Many still do not have needed skills. The challenge remains: how to continue to develop the skills and pathways that will lead to success. The six month follow-up at the end of October should be illuminating as to what has worked for them in looking back at the program experience.

### **General demographic information**

The participants who completed the questionnaire include three men and five women, the majority are between the ages of 36 and 55 years of age. Five report that they are African-American, one biracial and two of Latino origin. One of the participants completed a graduate or professional degree, two completed a college degree and 2 had some college or technical education, three had completed a GED/High school. All participants have been incarcerated, with three from 1-5 years and five experienced 6 years or more. Four participants reported that they were on probation. The majority indicate that they do well in school work, only one indicates they do not.

### **Family**

Two of the eight participants report being married, one has a domestic partner and five are single. Participants report having a few children (2-3).

The majority indicate that they get along with family, one does not and another does not express an opinion either way.

Four participants indicated that they are getting along better with their family, one was not and three were neutral about this.

### **Housing**

Five of the eight participants report that they are in need of housing, with a varied range of current living arrangements (emergency shelter, SRO, family & friends, transitional shelter). Two have supportive housing while one has permanent housing.

### **Employment and Benefits**

One participant has full time employment and another has part time. One participant reports looking for work, three reports being disabled, while one unemployed individual is not looking for work. Six participants are receiving benefits, two are not. None of the participants are veterans.

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### **Mental health & health**

These participants do not report that the experience of loss and trauma has made it difficult to cope. One participant indicates that substance use has made it difficult to cope, while for others this is not a concern. However five participants indicate that rehabilitation programs have helped them cope. Three of the eight participants have had health problems that have made it difficult to reach their goals.

### **General profile**

The majority of participants use support and social services, except for one who notes neither help. The majority indicates that can handle problems, issues, and concerns; in general they are able to control their lives. In a similar way they indicate that they are able to take care of their needs and that they do things which are meaningful to them, and that they can handle things when they go wrong. In terms of their perception that they are doing things which are more meaningful to them, two participants were neutral about this, two agreed, while four strongly agreed. This was the case when things went wrong, as seven felt better able to cope, only one was neutral about this.

Most participants indicate that spiritual growth is important, and that it helps them cope. Only one participant was neutral about spirituality.

### **Community connections**

Half of participants indicate that they have a community, with three neutral about this; while one indicates they do not. Six of the eight participants indicate that they have people with whom they enjoy doing things. The majority indicated they were encouraged to use support groups and social services. The findings regarding community are different than the feedback from the focus group which emphasizes the importance of the community they now have because of the program.

### **Spiritual growth**

Five of the eight participants felt that spiritual growth was important in their life and that it helped them to cope, two agreed with this. Only one participant was neutral about this. Two participants strongly agreed with the statement that they experienced spiritual growth during the program, while four agreed that they did, and two were neutral with this statement.

Three participants agreed or strongly agreed that their participation in a congregation increased. Two participants were neutral about this, and three disagreed that they increased participation in a congregation. Half of the participants strongly agreed that the congregation offered support, while three agreed that this was the case, with only one being neutral about this perspective.

### **Review of the services – Consumer satisfaction survey report**

Most participants liked the services they received through Coming Home, only two participants were neutral. Five were able to get all the services they needed, two were neutral and one indicated that they did not get services they needed.

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The majority of participants indicated that they learned how to improve their lives in skill sessions, with five of the eight indicating that the skill sessions met their expectations; three participants were neutral about this. Six of the eight would recommend this program.

Seven of the eight participants felt that staff was supportive and available; all agreed that staff believed they could grow, change and recover. All felt comfortable asking questions. The majority felt they were encouraged to take responsibility and were comfortable working with mentors on their set goals. Similarly they indicated that mentors understood their experience's and concerns and that they would stay in touch with them. Only one did not feel understood by their mentor. Similarly they felt that staff was sensitive to their circumstances

The majority of participants indicated that sharing life experiences helped them to think and do things differently; only one participant was neutral about this. The majority of participants indicated that program participants were supportive of their helping and development, with only one being neutral about this. Six of the eight participants believed that the program gave them an opportunity to help others, while two were neutral about this.

The majority of participants indicated that they had people with whom they could do enjoyable things while one was neutral.

### **The Sense of Coherence Measure**

The *Sense of Coherence Measure* (SOC), is a widely used and validated measure that expresses the extent to which one believes that stimuli or events eg death, trauma, job loss, etc. from their internal and external environments are structured, predictable and explicable, that resources are available to meet these demands and that doing so is worthy of investment of time and effort (Antonovsky, 1993; Eriksson & Lindstrom, 2005). The three key components of the SOC are comprehensibility, manageability, and meaningfulness.

- **Comprehensibility** refers to the extent to which one understands and perceives their internal and external environments as making cognitive sense – that one can make sense of stimuli one encounters in the future.
- **Manageability** is the extent to which one perceives that resources are at one's disposal or control to meet the demands of the stimuli and that one does not feel victimized by events or that life treats them unfairly.
- **Meaningfulness** refers to the extent that one feels life makes emotional sense and that the many demands in one's life is worth working for, worthy of commitment and engagement and that these 'stimuli' or challenges are 'welcome' rather than burdens – that life is worth living. Meaningfulness is also associated with spirituality, faith, and hope.

### **The SOC Scores for Bronxville**

The following scores are reviewed in terms of the overall total SOC score. It will be meaningful to review the specific scores around the three major factors when we collect post-test data and the reunion dinner. We will discuss the meaning of these scores once we have had an opportunity to do a full analysis across programs to establish a trend in service to the populations



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that the life skills program serves. As you will see from the report below, the fact that the majority of participants completing the questionnaire scored a strong moderate to moderate high indicates that this group of participants has considerable strengths in the way they understand their worlds, are able to manage, and make meaning. In fact, these scores are reflected in the report above that details their perception of coping and belonging to community.

The most recent Coming Home Program Participants (8) had a range of scores from 102 total points (which is a low score, to 165 points which was a high score. The majority scored 145-165 was a moderate to moderate plus score (see Table 1 for below).

The previous Coming Home Group of five participants scored higher than this group with a low of 118 points – that being the moderate scoring to 172, a high score, again the median was between 135 and 172 points – in the moderate - moving to higher score range. This score represents those who returned one year after they experienced Coming Home (see Table 2 below).

**Table 1 – SOC Scores Group 1**

Program	Proct	Date	COMP	MA	ME	TOT
Reformed Church Bronxville	ECB2a	TM/13	32	37	33	102
Post	ECB2a	GI/13	63	28	41	132
	ECB2a	Q4/13	59	50	44	153
	ECB2a	TJ4/13	68	50	47	165
	ECB2a	PJ4/13	39	37	39	115
	ECB2a	RB4/13	61	49	45	155
	ECB2a	GM/13	53	54	43	150
	ECB2a	JW/13	58	42	45	145
Sub-Total			433	347	337	1117
Average			54	43	42	140
Mean			51	42	42	136
Std Deviation			12	9	4	22
Min			32	28	33	102
Max			68	54	47	165

**Table 1 – SOC Scores Group 2**

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Program	Code	Test Date	COMP	MA	ME	TOT
Reformed Church Bronxville	BBB20C	4/27	53	44	38	135
Post	BBB21R	4/27	58	49	49	156
	BBB21D	4/27	49	43	26	118
	BBB21G	4/27	68	55	49	172
	BBB21J	4/27	61	49	43	153
Sub-Total			289	240	205	734
Average			58	48	41	147
Mean			57	48	39	144
Std Deviation			7	5	10	21
Min			49	43	26	118
Max			68	55	49	172

**Appendix E**  
**Focus Group Questionnaires**

**Focus Group Questionnaire – Prison Ministry at The Reformed Church of  
Bronxville**

1. Do you know anyone who is or was incarcerated?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
2. Did you know anyone who is or was incarcerated before RCB became involved in prison ministry in 2010?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
3. Which of our prison ministry related events have you attended? Select all that apply.  
☐ The Castle  
☐ Empowerment Sunday  
☐ Christian Education speakers  
☐ Coming Home Program 2010  
☐ Coming Home Program 2011  
☐ Coming Home Program 2012  
☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2010  
☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2011  
☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2012  
☐ Public Policy Forum  
☐ Lobbying  
☐ None of these
4. Did you watch the Coming Home documentary?  
☐ Yes  
☐ No
5. Please rate how much you learned from this video:  
☐ Learned a lot  
☐ Learned somewhat  
☐ Learned a little  
☐ There was no new information that I learned

6. Did the video change your perspective or feelings about incarceration?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
7. Would you share this video with others?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Not sure
8. Do you feel as though you have a better understanding of the prison ministries at RCB after viewing this video?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Not sure
9. Do you feel more motivated and empowered to make a difference in prison ministries after seeing this video?
- ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
  - ☐ Not sure

### **Focus Group – Discussion Questions**

1. What have you learned since we began this prison ministry at RCB?
2. Have you changed or grown spiritually? How has this contributed to your spiritual life?
3. How has our congregation changed or grown spiritually?
4. Considering all that we've learned in this ministry, what would you like to see our church do in the future?
5. Do you believe there is something you can do to make a difference? What would you see yourself doing to contribute to this?
6. What do you think is most difficult about getting more people engaged in prison ministry?
7. What more needs to be done regarding prison issues?

**Focus Group Questionnaire – Prison Ministry at The Reformed Church of  
Bronxville**

1. Do you know anyone who is or was incarcerated?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
2. Did you know anyone who is or was incarcerated before RCB became involved in prison ministry in 2010?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No
3. Which of our prison ministry related events have you attended? Select all that apply.
  - ☐ The Castle
  - ☐ Empowerment Sunday
  - ☐ *Hard Road Home* Film and Discussion
  - ☐ *Zero Percent* Documentary and Panel Discussion
  - ☐ Christian Education speakers
  - ☐ Coming Home Program 2010
  - ☐ Coming Home Program 2011
  - ☐ Coming Home Program 2012
  - ☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2010
  - ☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2011
  - ☐ Coming Home Speaker Sunday and/or Graduation 2012
  - ☐ A visit to Sing Sing or Riker's Island
  - ☐ Public Policy Forum
  - ☐ Lobbying
  - ☐ Osborne Benefit
  - ☐ Hudson Link Benefit
  - ☐ Esther House Prison Ministries
  - ☐ Vassar College Symposium
  - ☐ None of these
4. Did you watch the Coming Home documentary?
  - ☐ Yes
  - ☐ No

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